BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING MOUNTAIN BIKE MAGAZINE

Mountain Biking UK®

MAY 2015
ISSUE 315



FIX YOUR FAULTS

THE 10 MOST COMMON RIDING MISTAKES & HOW YOU CAN CURE THEM

GREAT PLACES TO RIDE RIGHT NOW

- Snowdonia
- Northern Ireland
- Cairngorms
- South Downs
- North Yorkshire

and more

Best hydration packs – we test 15 of the best for comfort and performance – pg 142

Snow joke – 150km isolated ice adventure across Finland – pg 101

UNLEASHED!

WHY JOSH BRYCELAND IS THE MOST EXCITING RIDER TO WATCH RIGHT NOW

DIY BIKE FIXES

MASTER MECHANIC

Basic bike maintenance and quick fixes you can do

4 BIKES TESTED

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6 trail shoes, X-Fusion fork, Gore shorts and loads more

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Well bastard fast



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SCOTT



Matt – we salute you and your snow-based adventuring!



BE AN INSIDER

We want to know what you think. After all, the more we know about you, the better placed we are to bring you the best magazine possible. So we'd like to invite you to join our online reader panel, Insiders.

Interested? Log on to **www.immediateinsiders.com/register** to fill out the short registration survey and we'll be in touch from time to time to ask for your opinions on the magazine and other relevant issues.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

insiders

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome back our intrepid explorers



It's with a sense of relief that I welcome you to this issue of *MBUK*. The reason is the feature on page 101. To summarise, for the best part of the past year our Deputy Art Editor, Matt, has been scheming about taking part in the Rovaniemi 150 – a 150km race across the frozen ice fields of Finland in sub-zero temperatures and with prolonged periods of isolation. Who wouldn't want to do that?! When he first mentioned it, I'll admit I had my reservations. Now, I never doubted Matt's ability on a bike, but this was his first attempt at any sort of bike race and the conditions in which he'd be losing his competitive virginity worried me a tad. Visions of him returning (he would return, wouldn't he?) minus digits – or worse, limbs – having succumbed to frostbite after being encased in a snow tomb started to cloud my judgment as to whether it was a good idea or not. But he persuaded me that his ample adventure experience would see him through. Well, that and his big grizzly beard. So I agreed, and after six months of speculation as to his fate I'm relieved to say it's all over. He did return. He even says he enjoyed it, but I think maybe he's just saying that... Go read his story, and even if it doesn't inspire you to go arctic in the depths of winter maybe it'll strike a chord with the adventurer in you and push you on to a different sort of challenge in the months ahead.



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Danny Walter *MBUK* Editor



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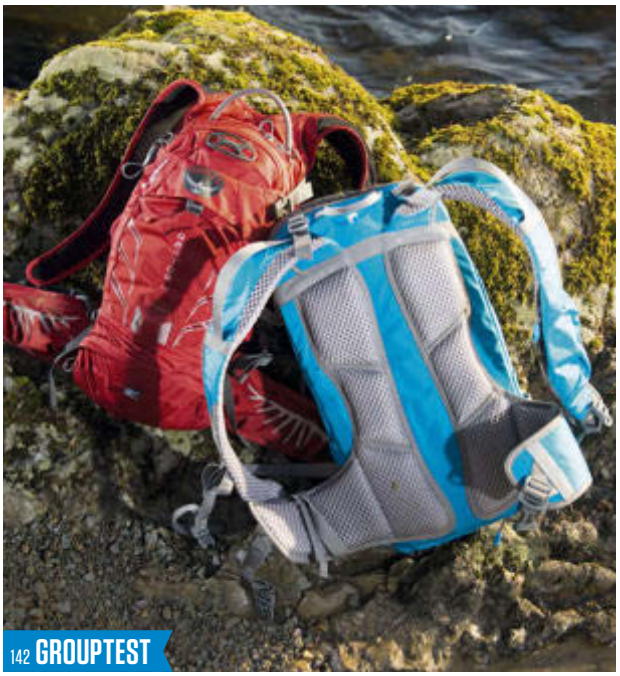


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MBUK

Out Front

THE **FIVE STORIES** LEADING THE WAY THIS MONTH

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ANDES PACIFICO

Cowboy country

AS ENDURO RACES go, this is a tough one – four days on technical trails across isolated terrain from the Chilean Andes to the Pacific Ocean, with nearly 10,000m of descending along the way. The harsh environment demands mental strength as well as top-level bike skills, which is why the Andes Pacifico is limited to just 80 riders, who have to be approved by the race organisers. It's also why this event has become an important pilgrimage for professional riders looking to blow away the cobwebs of winter before the opening round of the Enduro World Series.

The race starts in the ski resort of La Parva at an altitude of 3,550m (11,647ft) and serves up 19 stages that'll take many of the riders into alien territory. It's famous for cactus-lined trails cut into the dusty mountainsides by generations of cowboys, not to mention the ultra-fine dust aptly known as 'anti-grip'.

France's Fabien Barel narrowly missed out on the top spot this year due to race tape getting caught in his gears and melting in his rear brake, but he helped his countryman Nico Lau celebrate his win by throwing him in the ocean! With three Chilean riders placing in the top 10, it seems like enduro, with its elements of adventure and camaraderie, is certainly doing its bit to promote mountain biking around the world.

Photo: Dave Trumpore





REPAIRS & NEW RUNS

Big changes afoot in the FOD

JUST A SHORT drive from the M5 near Gloucester, the Forest of Dean has long been a popular riding destination, offering trail riders, downhillers and families alike a selection of trails to keep them coming back for more. While the increased volume of visitors in recent years has delivered much-needed revenue, the trails have taken a beating in the process.

The Verderers' trail has exceeded Forestry Commission expectations with around 70,000 visits a year since it opened in 2011, and that's meant it's suffered serious erosion. By the time you read this, the final descent will have been restored to its former glory. Alterations have been made to the new Launch Pad downhill run too – apparently some riders of two-wheeled bikes were getting carried away (literally) on this trail designed for four-wheeled bikes.

The big news is that approval has been given to build new runs in a part of the forest that hosted regular DH races in the early 2000s but has no official trails at present. Uplift providers FlyUp Downhill will be working closely with the real heroes of the FOD, the Dean Trail Volunteers, to deliver some exciting new DH tracks to shred.

With even more car parking, not to mention some of the best trail centre food this side of the Bristol Channel, it's time to get down to the FOD.

www.flyupdownhill.co.uk
www.deantrailvolunteers.com

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Amid all the bling carbon, alloy bikes are still bloomin' good – and much cheaper

MATERIAL MATTERS

Time for an alloy revival?

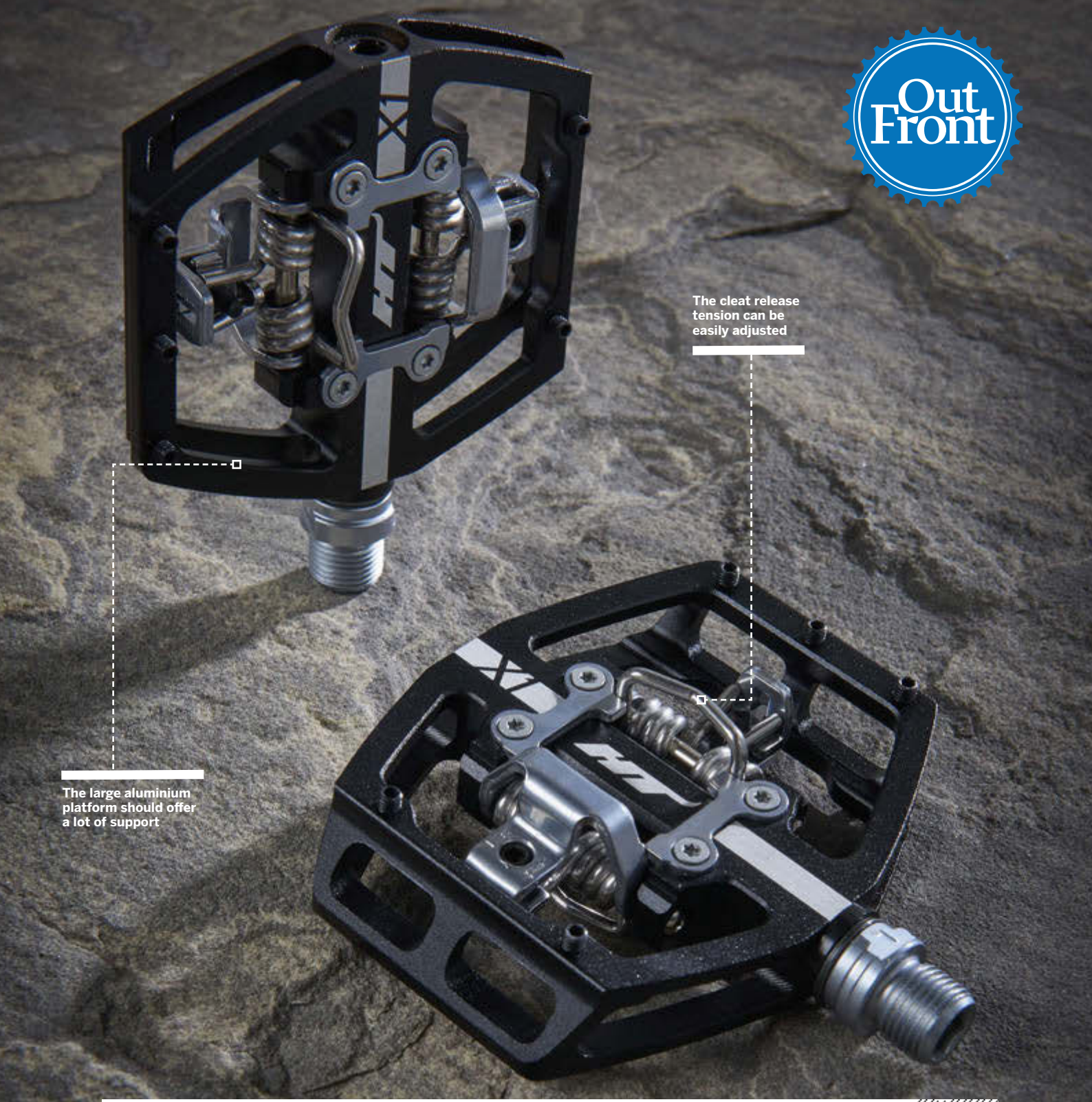
ADVANCES IN MANUFACTURING mean we can now make bikes and components from all kinds of materials. But with the continuing rise of carbon fibre as a favoured material for just about anything 'high end', are we ignoring the advantages of humble aluminium alloys?

The latest manufacturing techniques – from advanced heat treating that increases strength and stiffness, to hydroforming that enables tubing to be forced into any number of shapes – mean today's alloy bikes are better performing and better looking than ever before, and they're a whole lot cheaper to produce than carbon, chromoly steel or titanium bikes too.

Then there's the way alloy bikes feel on the trail – stiff, predictable and with a consistent ride feel. Yes, carbon bikes can be made stiffer and even lighter, but unless you're a really aggressive rider, that stiffness can actually be detrimental to the ride feel. And when it comes to components like wheels and downhill frames, where a lot of material has to be used to make them sufficiently stiff and tough, carbon versions can actually end up heavier than their aluminium cousins.

While carbon seems set to continue playing an important role in bike manufacturing, let's look at brands like Transition, Kona, GT and Orange. All have new models with all the bells and whistles you'd expect of a 2015 bike but made out of good old alloy – light, strong and a lot cheaper than their carbon counterparts.

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HT DH PEDALS

Good enough for Gwin

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DEVELOPED WITH TWO-TIME World Cup champ Aaron Gwin, the X1s are HT's attempt to break into the clipless downhill pedal market. The large (83x92mm) aluminium body ought to provide a stable platform and there are five removable grub screw pins so you can tailor the amount of grip.

The unique engagement system uses an unusually long cleat and broad mechanism in a bid to make clipping in less fiddly in the heat of DH racing. The release tension can be adjusted via twin bolts – a real plus for those who find their feet being blown off other pedals – and the release angle is fixed at eight to 10 degrees.

This gives the pedals much less float than the popular CrankBrothers Mallets, which offer a choice of 15 or 20-degree release. The amount of float on CrankBros' pedals is a love/hate feature though, and some riders may prefer the security of the X1s' tighter release angle.

Our sample set weighs 479g. If weight is a real concern, a titanium axle version is available for £200, at a claimed 416g. Will we prefer them to the tried and tested competitors? We'll keep you posted. They come in 10 different colours.

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Fresh on the scene and flat out

SET TO CAUSE a stir at the races this year, 17-year-old Elliott Heap from Wigan is the newest member of the CRC PayPal team, joining the likes of Sam Hill, Joe Smith and Mike Jones. While he may be a new name to many of us, he's no stranger to going fast.

"I raced motocross from the age of six," says Elliott. "But after eight years of racing I'd broken my wrist twice, dislocated and broken my elbow, and I was only 14." With all the injury time off the bike, he needed something else to help get him back up to speed. "I asked my dad to get me a mountain bike, which he did."

It didn't take long for Elliot to start making a name for himself on the MTB scene, with his best result so far being a win in the Youth category at the formidable – and for some unridable – Llangollen round of the British Downhill Series (BDS) last year. An unknown rider with the right attitude winning a race like that gets attention from team managers, but when you start making web edits that are on another level, that's when people really take notice. Towards the end of 2014, Elliot's wild riding style hit the internet in a big way.

This will be a huge year for this young racer as he prepares to storm the World Cup, BDS and Enduro World Series. Watch this space...

Photo: Richard Bayburt



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Bob Fox

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The Puls

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Plus Santa Cruz hardtails

7 cardinal trail sins

Avoid these etiquette errors to become a singletrack saint!

1 Stopping on the trail

We all have to stop from time to time, to fix a mechanical, catch our breath or just take in the scenery. But we don't have to stand in the middle of the trail while we do it, especially just after a drop or blind corner! Removing yourself and your bike from the track is a must, for your own safety as well as that of others.

2 Holding up faster riders

If faster riders approach and the trail's wide enough for you to pull over and let them pass, do. That way they can enjoy their ride, and you can check out their riding and maybe pick up some tips about how to carry speed.

3 Tailgating slower riders

If you're an accomplished biker, be patient with slower riders who haven't realised you're stuck behind them or don't know the best way to let you pass. Buzzing their rear tyre or shoving past is only going to make them nervous and more likely to blunder into your path. Shout "rider!" and wait for a suitable place for them to pull over or you to whizz by.

4 Relying on others to bail you out

Nobody likes a leech! Don't rely on your riding buddies to get you out of scrapes – wear the right gear for the weather/terrain, and pack some basic tools and spares so you're not left stranded miles from your car – a multi-tool, master link, spare tube and pump at the least, plus water and food.

5 Wrecking the trails

It doesn't matter if you're riding a manmade loop at a trail centre or a ribbon of buff singletrack in the woods – trails don't build themselves. Skidding, casing jumps, straightlining corners to save seconds on Strava and riding sensitive trails in the wet isn't going to make you very popular – especially if you're not prepared to pick up some tools and repair the damage.

6 Giving the sport a bad name

When you're out on your bike you'll often come into contact with other trail users – walkers, families out enjoying the outdoors and horse riders. They may be slowing you down on your favourite downhill but there's no excuse for shouting at them or showering them with mud. They've got the right of way (except on dedicated MTB trails) and making a bad name for our sport won't help anyone.

7 Being a grumpy antisocial git

Riding around with a face like a bulldog chewing wasps and ignoring the cheery smiles and hellos from other riders just isn't the done thing. Let's leave all the seriousness and antisocial behaviour to the roadies...



Tracy Moseley We catch up with another UK racing legend – pg 93

Rob won a DH World Cup round in 1996 – the first British rider to do so

As good on a bike as he is on the mic

Rob Warner isn't your average sports commentator...



With the race season about to kick off, we caught up with Red Bull's resident motormouth and the UK's first ever DH World Cup winner, Rob Warner...

What's the most memorable race run you've commentated on?
Probably Sam Hill's run at the 2008 World Champs in Val di Sole, Italy – that was off the chart! There have been so many though – Danny Hart's in Champéry, Peaty in Canberra...

What's it like, having been a World Cup racer and now being a World Cup commentator?
Not much difference actually. I wake up early, usually feeling uptight. I get ready – the same sort of approach to a race, but with a f**k of a lot more to think of – and then, boom, it's race time! The biggest difference is that I'm exhausted after commentating...

Have you made any big mistakes?
I got held up by an overenthusiastic dad as I was rushing to get in the commentary box. He did my nut in. When I finally got in there I 'released' and called him everything under the sun and then some, before getting a text telling me to turn off the mic!

What would you change about World Cup racing?
I'd have more of them. A 10-round series would be more like it. That and more natural tracks like Méribel.

The UK's been at the top of DH racing for a while now. Can you see our domination lasting?
Yes. It's really healthy at grassroots level so good riders will keep coming through. Why's it so big? Maybe it's the legacy of JMC [Jason McRoy] and Peaty [Steve Peat].

What's the funniest story you can share from your career?
Shaun Palmer asking a cop who was pointing a hand cannon at us if he was "so angry because his old lady was getting it elsewhere" has to be up there!

Which place sticks in your mind?
Japan – it's off its tits! Everything's neon and smells of fish. I love it!

You see riders coming up through the ranks. Who's your eye on?
I think Mike Jones will be the next of the new generation of British riders. He reminds me of Gee [Atherton] or Peaty. He's young, he's got Sam [Hill] as a mentor and he's quick.

If you were a team manager which three riders would you pick?
Gee, Bryce [Josh Bryceland] and Mike.

You can still throw a bike about. What riding do you like to do?
I literally only ride in the Chilterns. It's only XC for me these days – and as much time as I can on the ones with engines.

What do you think about enduro?
I'm sure it's sort of fun to do but I don't think it's much fun to watch, but then DH's always been my thing.

What's it like being involved with the London shop Soho Bikes?
It can be stressful but it's a good laugh most of the time.

What does the future hold for MTB?
Catherine wheels, fatter bikes and skinsuits for downhill.

What's your greatest achievement?
Teaching my kid to do doughnuts on his motorbike at the age of two is up there!



The man who's been called 'a mountain biking James Hunt' has still got the moves

Photos: Simon Nieborak



AZ OF MOUNTAIN BIKING

E Enduro

'Enduro' is the current buzzword, applied to everything from bikes to bum bags (yes, seriously), but just what is it? In essence, it's a race format that's grown rapidly over the past couple of years...

AZ An enduro race is a stage race much like a rally, combining timed stages with linking sections that don't count towards your final position but still have to be completed within a set time. If you miss your allotted start time for a stage, you incur a penalty.

AZ Stages include more descending than climbing, but most will contain some kind of slogging uphill sprint, whether on singletrack or a fireroad. The downhill element of the stages is usually extremely technical, meaning skill is important as well as fitness.

AZ Enduro is being touted as the epitome of mountain bike racing because you need a serious level of endurance fitness as well as a high level of technical skill and a strong focus to keep racing over long periods of time. The top guys in the world are insanely fit, but us lesser mortals can still have a go.

AZ The good thing about enduro is that you probably already have a suitable bike. If you're happy riding downhill singletrack and climbing on the same bike, then you're halfway there. It's a fun race format and makes for a great day out on the bike.

AZ The Mini Enduro series (www.mini enduro.tv) is the place to start, using trails that are technical but not ridiculously hard. The UK Gravity Enduro series (www.ukgravityenduro.com) is a big step up in difficulty and required fitness. The Enduro World Series (EWS) is top of the tree, so you need to be very fit and skilled to compete.





Spring is in the air

THREE THINGS THAT MAKE THIS SEASON AWESOME

Winter can be a challenging time of year for those who get their kicks in the great outdoors, which only makes the arrival of spring all the more welcome. Here's what we've been looking forward to...

1 SHEDDING LAYERS

Layering up is always a delicate balance between fending off the elements and overheating. So it's great when the temperature rises enough that you can say goodbye to your jacket and hello to your summer jersey. Maybe don't put that trusty baselayer away just yet though...

2 HERO DIRT

It may be some time until we have dusty trails, but those puddle-riddled ribbons of dirt through the forest that we find ourselves drawn to are already starting to dry out. As the dirt starts to dry it gets tacky, delivering more grip and smiles all round. Hero dirt is the best, so make the most of it!

3 LONGER DAYS

More daylight hours means more time to shred, with the possibility of after-work rides without lights fast approaching. With warmer temperatures, tacky dirt and lighter evenings already here, what on earth are you waiting for? Get out there and make the most of it!

MBUK PRO'S EYE VIEW



HANNAH BARNES

RACER AND ADVENTURER

"People often talk of a new year being full of new beginnings, and that was certainly true for me. Changing sponsors can be exciting and scary, and moving to one of the biggest bike brands in the world was certainly both! Everyone at Specialized has been so welcoming though, and I already feel right at home.

The winter in Fort William was pretty wet and wild, so having a new bike was brilliant motivation to get me out the door and my new 650b Enduro was a lot of fun on the awkward, techy trails. We also had quite a bit of snow – it's pretty cool to live in a place where we can ski in the morning and ride bikes in the afternoon!

"IT'S PRETTY COOL WE CAN SKI IN THE MORNING AND RIDE IN THE AFTERNOON!"

The first EWS race of the year in Rotorua, New Zealand, was the perfect excuse for some respite from the cold and rain, so at the end of January I flew to Auckland and bought an old car... which overheated 20 minutes down the road in rush hour traffic! After nursing it back to the garage, they swapped it for another and I was back on the road. First stop was Nelson, a mountain biking paradise. It felt amazing to suddenly be in summer, but I soon got used to long, hot and dusty rides, daily yoga, swimming in the sea and delicious fresh produce from the local market. What a difference a change in location can make to your enthusiasm!

THE BEST OF...

RISCA

A former mining town at the mouth of the Ebbw Valley in South Wales, Risca is flanked by steep hillsides that offer up the kind of terrain mountain bikers dream of. Most visitors to the area will be familiar with the trails just north of here at Cwmcarn, but a thriving local MTB scene that dates back over two decades means the area has much more to offer than just the one trail centre.





THE LOCAL

Growing up in the village of Pontywaun between Risca and Cwmcarn, **Tim Williams** knows these valleys like no other. With 30 years' riding and racing experience and two national DH titles, he knows a great trail when he sees one. Tim still races today, though just for fun, and works for Mojo, Fox suspension's UK distributor.

ACCOMMODATION

Upper Grippath Farm (www.uppergrippath.co.uk) offers four-star self-catering cottages – with saunas! – in a truly stunning location on the hill above Risca, which puts you within riding distance of the trails yet only a short drive from civilisation. On the other side of the valley, Pentre Tai Farm (www.pentretaifarm.co.uk) is a bike friendly B&B that's close to the Mynydd Machen trails.

TRAILS

Aside from the XC loops and DH tracks at Cwmcarn, there are plenty of other trails to explore in the valley. Head up 'Machen Mountain' from Risca and you can descend some of the best trails you'll ever ride. Head back over the hill for the trails into the Sirhowy Valley near Wyllie. For an all-day ride try the three peaks – Mynydd Machen, then Mynydd Islwyn, finishing with Coed Medart at Cwmcarn.

ENTERTAINMENT

There's a choice of pubs in Risca, all offering a vibrant atmosphere at weekends. There's regular live music at the Exchange Inn and the Fox & Hounds, while The Commercial is a popular place with the locals. The Prince of Wales, found on the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal towpath, which is part of the National Cycle Network, is great for a post/mid-ride beer, with fine mountain views.

FOOD

Most pubs in Risca offer excellent pub food. If you fancy something more spicy then the Tamarind curry house is the most popular in the area, but make sure you book a table! The Darran, a pub in the north of Risca, serves food all day and is great for stopping for a refuel before tackling the next hill. If you're self-catering, Risca has an abundance of great takeaways to choose from too.

CRAFTY





CRAFTY XR - £3,799



CRAFTY R - £2,799



CRAFTY - £2,399

FORWARD GEOMETRY

ZERO

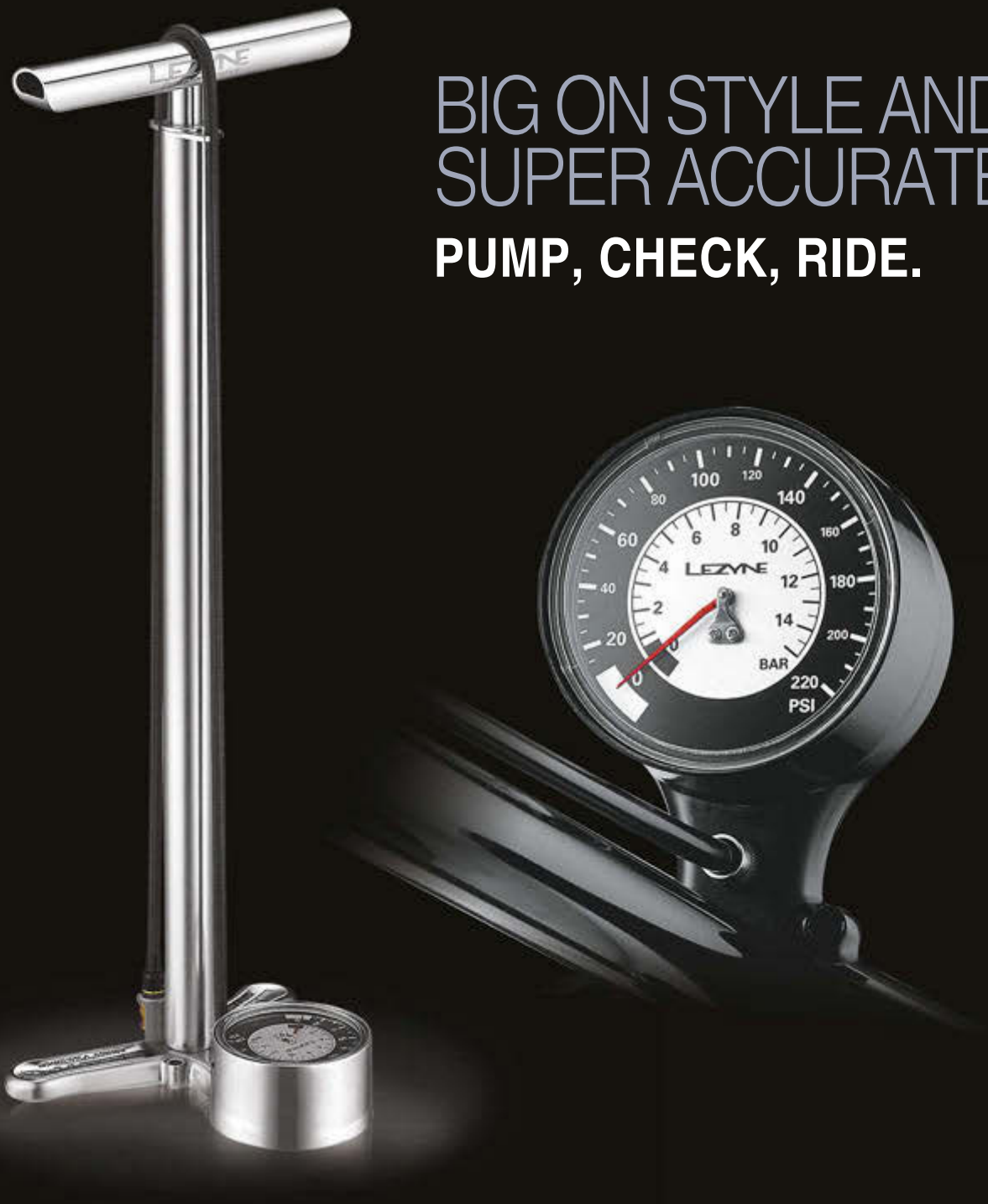
- Award Winning Forward Geometry
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- 29” wheels
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DIY BIKE TOOLS

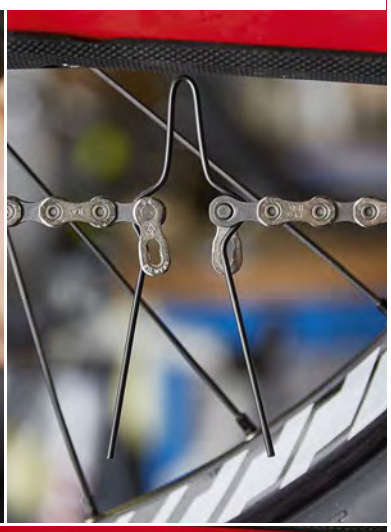
#2 MASTER LINK REMOVER

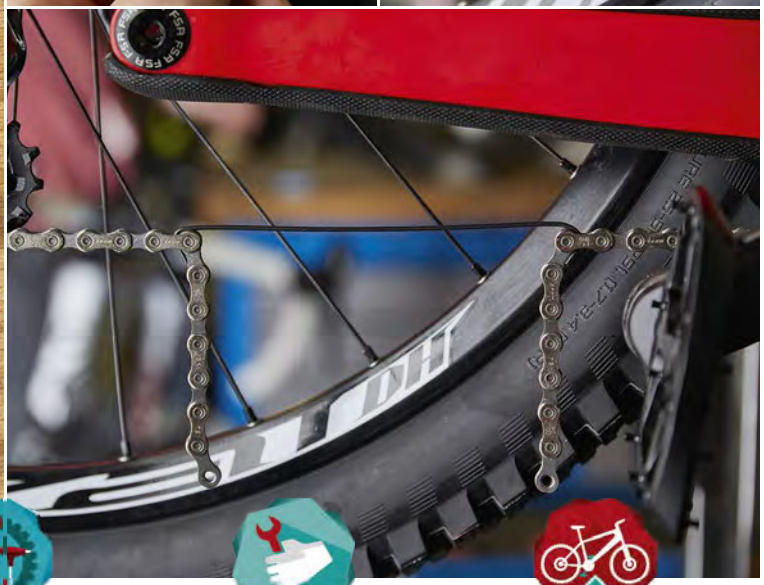
POP YOUR CHAIN OPEN WITH NO WRESTLING

Master links let you install, remove or rejoin your chain without any tools, but they can be a pain to undo. This simple fix makes it much easier to uncouple SRAM PowerLocks (10/11-speed), SRAM PowerLinks (8/9-speed) and KMC MissingLinks.









PARTS AND TOOLS

The only part you'll need to make this tool is an old spoke, with the ends cut off. Use another spoke (also without ends) to make a second very simple tool to hold the chain together for reassembly. Most bike shops will sell you spokes for very little or you may even have some spares if you've bought new wheels recently. The only tools you'll need to make these tools are two sets of pliers. You'll also need a marker pen.

MAKE THE TOOL

Use the pliers to bend the spoke in half. About an inch from the bend make a mark with the pen, 5mm down make a second mark, then a third mark 5mm below that. Use the pliers to bend the spoke out at 45 degrees at the first mark, in at 90 degrees at the second mark and out again at 45 degrees at the third mark, as in the photos above. Repeat on the other side. Next cut a 10cm length off the second spoke and bend both ends into shallow hooks.

USE THE TOOL

Thread the first tool through the chain so that it cradles the master link within the bent section. Pinch the top bend of the tool with a set of pliers. This should compress and undo the link. To rejoin the chain, hook each end of the second tool over a chain link that's a couple of links away from the split. This will keep the chain under tension, allowing you to insert the master link. Remove the tool and the master link should slide shut.

For a video walkthrough, head over to *www.mbuk.com*

KNOW YOUR BIKE

UNLOCKING THE TECHNICAL JARGON TO EXPLAIN HOW OUR BIKES WORK

FORKS



RIGID

The lightest, simplest and most fuss-free type of fork, with no moving parts to go wrong and no maintenance required – but also no springs and damping to soak up impacts and increase traction. Now largely the preserve of singlespeed and fatbike fans – though if you're on a tight budget, we'd take a rigid fork over a poor quality suspension fork any day.



SINGLE CROWN

The most common type of suspension fork, with a single upper crown to hold the legs in place and anywhere between 80 and 180mm (3.1 and 7.1in) of travel. Used for everything from XC and enduro racing to slopestyle.



DUAL CROWN

Dual crown forks sport extended legs held together by twin crowns – one above and one below your bike's head tube – for extra strength and stiffness. They're used primarily for DH racing and big-mountain freeriding, and generally offer around 200mm (7.9in) of travel.



INVERTED

On regular mountain bike forks the stanchions (the smaller diameter tubes that the legs move up and down on) are attached to the crown. On inverted, or upside-down, forks they're attached to the axle, like on modern motorbike forks. The benefits include a suppler feel and less unsprung mass, but the need for mountain bike forks to be kept relatively light means inverted designs have often been prone to flex.



THANK GOD FOR...

EFFECTIVE AIR SUSPENSION

WHEN AIR-SPRUNG shocks first appeared in the mid 90s they were light years ahead of the elastomer-equipped competition, but the arrival of reliable coil-sprung dampers with a plusher, more linear stroke meant they were quickly superseded. Roll on a few years and air springs began to reappear. The weight advantages over a steel or even titanium coil spring, plus the adjustable spring rate and more progressive feel, made air-sprung shocks a popular choice for most XC and trail bikes by the early 2000s.

It took a few more years for air springs to filter into forks, but they quickly took over for everything but DH racing and freeriding. Recent victories for air-sprung bikes on the DH World Cup circuit and Red Bull Rampage show even these strongholds of coil-sprung suspension are coming around to air springs, thanks to brands like BOS, RockShox and Fox.

FLASHBACK

2005
NEW TECHNOLOGIES



THE HALLMARKS OF the modern trail bike – 120mm+ of suspension travel and relatively slack angles at a weight that didn't preclude climbing – first began to appear in the early 2000s, with bikes like the Santa Cruz Nomad and Specialized Enduro leading the way. At the time, it was such a new concept that geometry took a back seat as companies focused on emerging component technology instead.

THAT WAS THEN THIS IS NOW!

#53 Trail bikes

2015
LONG, LOW AND SLACK



TODAY'S TRAIL BIKES are more capable on the descents than a World Cup DH bike from 10 years ago, yet they can be pedalled uphill like an XC bike. The growth of enduro has forced bike engineers to reconsider geometry, both in terms of improving performance on the trail and producing a bike that fits the rider better, upping efficiency and reducing fatigue. The result is bikes that are longer, lower and slacker than ever.

THREE REASONS TO...

HIT THE 'ARD ROCK ENDURO

www.ardrockenduro.co.uk 8-9 August 2015



1 THE VIBE

With almost 2,000 riders attending and a chilled vibe, it's the world's biggest mates' race. Ride together, listen to live music, drink beers, camp in a stunning National Park and eat scrumptious Yorkshire food.



2 THE TRAILS

The trails are marked out on huge, rocky hillsides and designed specifically for this race, so it's a one-off opportunity to ride them and experience the best natural – and gnarly – descents in the Yorkshire Dales.



3 THE CHALLENGE

While 45km may not sound too challenging, with nearly 1,500m of climbing and descending on brutal trails, it's an achievement even to finish – making the 'Ard Rock Enduro the perfect event to aim for in 2015.

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Photo: Charles Robertson

LIVING THE DREAM

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES FROM THOSE WHO'VE SUCCESSFULLY TURNED MOUNTAIN BIKING INTO MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY

Dave Barton & Dan Critchlow, Burgtec

Having turned their love for mountain biking into their jobs 10 years ago, business partners Dave Barton (MD) and Dan Critchlow (product design and development) have used their common desire to produce products that no one else does to create a globally recognised brand. Over to Dave and Dan...

It all started because we were looking for the best platform pedal and simply couldn't find what we were looking for at the time. When the opportunity to make exactly what we wanted arose, we grabbed it with both hands. Production started in 2004 and we haven't looked back. For us, Burgtec is all about attention to detail, reliability, staying ahead of the curve and fine-tuning every aspect of what we do to make it better.

Going from an idea on a drawing board to a final product on the trail as a small business is a quick process. Our offset shock bushes, for example, and before that the original RideWide bars, were in production six months before anyone else even had a prototype. Turning an idea around in very little time is a massive advantage and one we use as much as we can.

Manufacturing in the UK is a bit more expensive than it is in the Far East, but on the flipside, the quality is much better and it gives us the ability to knock up a prototype on a Friday, test it over the weekend and go into production on the Monday.

Managing a budget for advertising has always been tough because we invest a lot in prototyping and R&D. We just try to make the best products we can and the brand has built itself off the back of those products. Having top riders wanting to use our stuff has definitely helped.

Fashions and trends are always changing. Bar width has thankfully now settled down at 800mm, but the original RideWide bars we made sold like mad because they were the first readily available 'wide bars' on the market. The integrated crown we made for the first Fox 40 sold really well too, but as soon as Fox and the other fork manufacturers changed to a standardised four-bolt design, the demand disappeared.

We've been fortunate to have had some big names represent us on the world stage. Greg Minnaar won two World Championships in a row on our direct-mount stem and we even had Sam Blenkinsop buy some pedals on the Wednesday before a World Cup race, which he then used to take the win on the Sunday – that was pretty awesome!

This is going to be a busy year for us with the arrival of the new Enduro MKII stem, which is being produced right now. We also have chainrings, and new clipless pedals, which are still at the prototype stage and coming out later this year. We've got a new saddle that's currently in the field being tested too.

> "For us, Burgtec is all about attention to detail, reliability, staying ahead of the curve and fine-tuning every aspect of what we do to make it better"

Our best advice for any budding entrepreneur is to be sure you have a genuinely good idea – not just an idea that you think is good because you thought of it. Oh, and don't read any forums either!

MBUK

RETAIL THERAPY

Camo's back!



Fashions come and go, but one that just keeps coming back in mountain biking is camouflage gear, and it's a big theme for 2015. Whether you want to stand out or blend in with your surroundings, here's our pick of the hottest camo products to be seen in – or not – on the trails.

1. DAKINE VECTRA JERSEY

If you're looking for a short-sleeve jersey with a relaxed cut, the Vectra could be just the ticket, made from a quick-drying fabric and with a handy sunglasses wipe to help keep you on point.

£25 www.dakine.com

2. GIRO PHASE OPEN-FACE HELMET

The lightweight, extensively vented Phase is designed for those long days on the trails spent racking up the miles and getting lost in the woods, and won't break the bank.

£69.99 www.zyro.co.uk

3. GIRO DND GLOVES

The Down And Dirty gloves are stripped back to the bare bones for increased feel through the handlebar, with a faux suede palm to reduce bunching and a four-way stretch upper for comfort.

£26.99 www.zyro.co.uk

4. ACRE THE HAUSER 10L HYDRATION PACK

Designed to keep the elements at bay and withstand the harshest of environments, The Hauser is fully waterproof and includes a useful tool roll to help manage your load.

US$195 www.acre-supply.com

5. GIRO CIPHER FULL-FACE HELMET

The Cipher sports an integrated camera mount, extensive ventilation, anti-microbial padding and colours to suit all persuasions.

£149.99 www.zyro.co.uk

6. FOX SERGEANT SHORTS

The aptly named Sergeant shorts come in olive or black camo. Made from two-way stretch fabric with a cargo pocket on each leg and a detachable liner, they're a useful addition to any riding arsenal.

£80 www.foxhead.com

7. DAKINE SHUTTLE 6L HYDRATION PACK

Less is more with the Shuttle – it's a minimalist pack for riders who don't need or want to carry a lot of gear and water with them on the trails.

£45 www.dakine.com



Photo: Simon Nieborak

INDUSTRY INSIDER

JUAN GRAZIOSI

FOUNDING PARTNER, GAMUT USA

The day job
We start with addressing our customer service demands. Our goal is to produce the best products but we know that how you support those products is how you build a lasting reputation. Since we're still a small company, I get to wear a lot of hats. On a typical day, I might be overseeing local production, visiting/calling vendors and packing orders for shipping.

Best part of the job
The best thing about working at Gamut is seeing our products on people's bikes. We want our customers to have faith that our products are strong, reliable and ready to meet any challenge they throw at them. We love mountain biking and do what we can to contribute to people's enjoyment of the sport.

New products
Expanding our offering beyond chain guides is critical for us to survive so we'll continue to add to our selection where we feel we can contribute to moving a technology forward or filling a rider need. We've always had aspirations to do more. With some unique new products, increased production and more R&D bandwidth, we're at the most exciting time in the history of our brand. We remain a rider owned and rider inspired company, so we can let the evolution of the sport be our guide. That said, we believe chain guides will still play a role even as most riders adopt narrow/wide chainrings and clutch mechs. We speak to a lot of riders and racers who are back in the market for a variety of reasons.

Sponsored riders
Many of our long-term sponsored riders (who include Curtis Keene and Greg Minnaar) were friends before the brand existed. Some of them could get bigger contracts elsewhere, but they stay with us because they're part of the family and they like what we do. Our priority is to support athletes who represent the best parts of the sport on and off the bike, so we're looking for people who are good people first and talented athletes second.

Next big thing
If we can sort out electronics, I think we may see some real innovation. Then again, I hope we don't overcomplicate our simple toy. I started riding bikes not because of the innovation, but for the ride.

The future
Expect to see some thoughtful product additions. Our acquisition of Point One Racing means we've added some serious firepower in terms of design and product engineering, so we're looking forward to an exciting year of new ideas.

Favourite MTB product
If I had to pick only one favourite product right now, it would probably be the dropper post – or any Gamut product, of course!



NEW SANTA CRUZ HIGHBALLS

Santa Cruz have redesigned their Highball hardtail for 2015, introducing a new 650b model, updating the geometry of the original 29er bike and adding a cheaper carbon frame option.

The Highball 29 now has a longer front end (599.9mm effective top tube, medium size), shorter chainstays (430mm) and keeps the same 70.5-degree head angle. Cable routing is fully internal and a 27.2mm post boosts comfort – both firsts for Santa Cruz, and features shared with the new Highball 27.5. Top tube lengths are the same on the 650b bike as on the 29er but it gets a slacker 69-degree head angle, shorter 425mm stays and a longer wheelbase (1,095 vs 1,079mm, medium).

Both bikes are available in Santa Cruz's top-grade CC and one-step-down C carbon, with full builds starting from £2,399 and frames at £1,699. The alloy Highball 29 is still in production too, and gets the same geometry updates.

Slinging a leg over both new models at the launch, the 650b bike's handling was in line with the 29er's but with a livelier rear end feel. The frame still had the comfort of the 29er but acceleration was blisteringly fast and it had more of a point-and-shoot feel when things got really twisty.

www.santacruzbikes.co.uk

NORCO AURUM CARBON 650B

Far from being late to the 650b party, Norco began development of their new mid-wheeled Aurum downhill bike back in 2012. Here's the lowdown...

1 650b redesign
Development of the new Aurum started three years ago, long before 650b DH bikes became fashionable. The bike was ground-up redesigned around the new wheel size, with the suspension geometry being revised to ensure the axle path wasn't compromised.

2 Race-ready suspension
The leverage curve has been tweaked to provide more support in the mid-stroke to cope with the demands of World Cup racing. Allied with a fairly firm base tune on the shock, this translates into a noticeably supportive and efficient feel.

3 Gravity Tune geometry
Feedback from test riders convinced Norco that the ideal rear centre length (distance from BB to rear axle) varies depending on the rider's height and frame size. On the new Aurum, the front and rear centre lengths both increase with frame size, helping different sized riders achieve a similar weight balance.

4 Privateer-friendly details
External cable routing ensures faff-free fettling, frame bearings are designed to be hard wearing and easy to service, and a suite of frame protectors shields the carbon from harm.

5 Solid spec
The Aurum C1 is £4,750 with RockShox Boxxer WC fork, Cane Creek Double Barrel shock and SRAM X01 DH kit (or £7,000 if you want ENVE wheels). The C2 and C3 use the same frame but more affordable kit.

www.evanscycles.com



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VERY FAST GOING UP. SCARY FAST GOING DOWN.

"THE HANDS DOWN FAVORITE DURING THIS YEAR'S ROUND OF BIKE TESTING IN SEDONA, ARIZONA." PINKBIKE.COM

The new Mojo HD (HD3 for short) is the third act in the Mojo HD/Mojo HDR trailbike trilogy. Everything is new from the ground-up, notably featuring the latest and greatest refinement of the famed dw-link suspension. Geometry is fully modern: longer, lower and slacker, with 6" of plush rear wheel travel. We've built in versatile internal routing and updated the carbon fiber frame design, allowing us to put a water bottle on top of the downtube. We also achieve a drop in weight and pedaling performance on par with the Ripley, so the bike is very fast going up, and scary fast going down.

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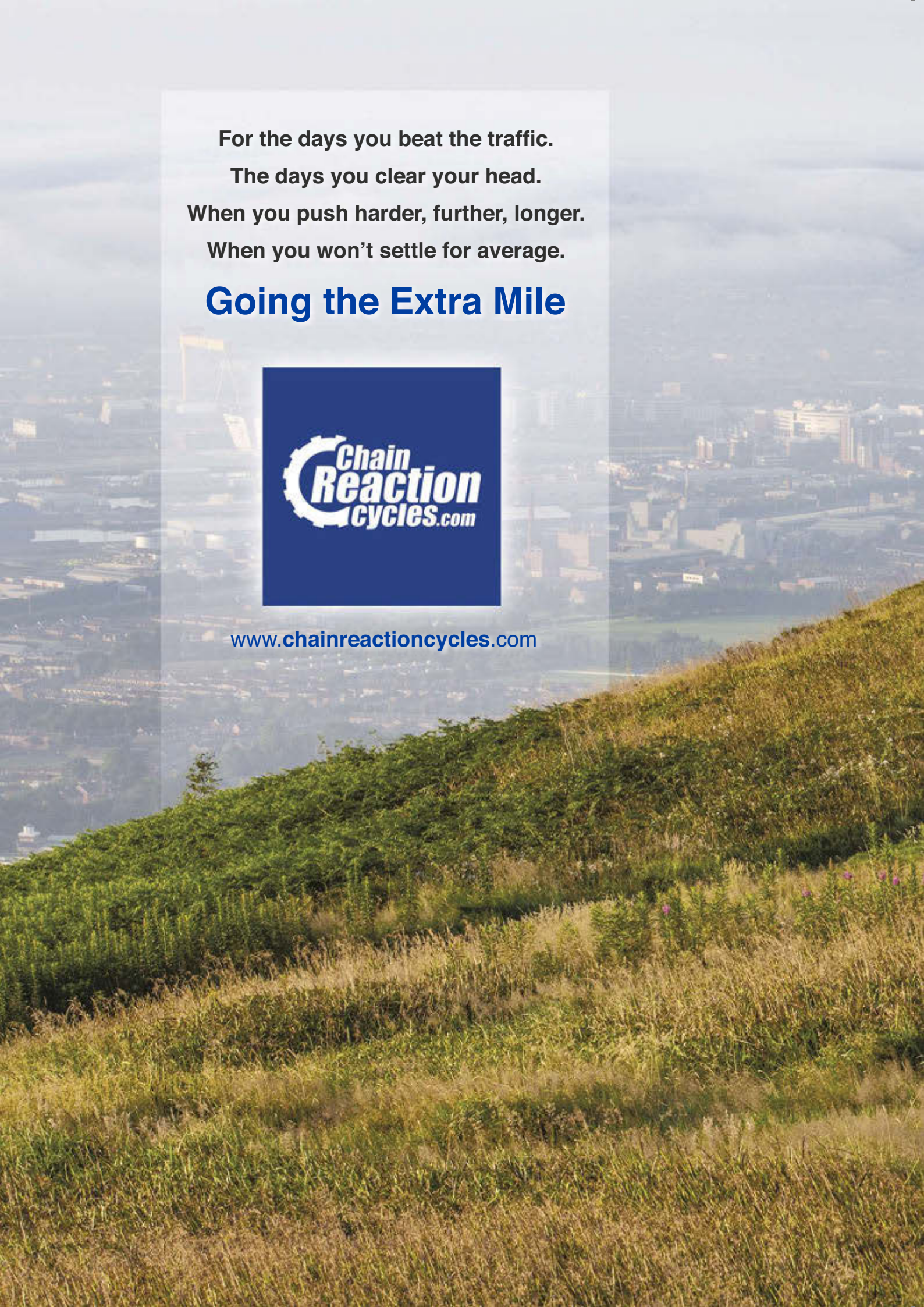

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photo: Dillon Osborne

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★ MBUK STAR LETTER

On holiday in Australia, I'd mentioned to the wife that I might slip off for a ride, and a week in, the opportunity presented itself courtesy of some randoms we met. They were going to some trails with an uplift service and invited me along. I arrived dressed as... well, a tourist, while everyone else was in full body armour, full-face helmets and neck braces. This wasn't going to be like riding in Norfolk...

I hired a Norco Atomik, which, considering that I normally ride a Cotic Soul and had never tried a full-susser before, was a bit of a culture shock. Man, it was so much fun! The trails were sick, dusty and hardpacked, surrounded by 8m tree ferns and the smell of eucalyptus, and fast as hell. A totally amazing experience. The guys I met were awesome too. Really friendly and full of tips. There was a guy riding for the first time after having a brain tumour removed. He said the one thing that got him through all the chemo was getting back on the bike. And he could ride!

It just shows the power of the bike and what it means to us, where it takes us, and the people and places we wouldn't get to experience without it. So good luck to that Aussie guy. As for me, I now want a full-susser. And a scan for the shoulder I used as a brake on our last run of the day. So that's what the body armour is for...

NEIL GOSLING, NORWICH

That's the problem with hiring bikes, Neil – they're either complete sheds and you take your life in your hands riding them or they're more fun than your own bike and the envy sets in! Glad to hear you had such a great time Down Under and hope the shoulder heals soon.



The 9in travel Norco was a bit of a change from Neil's steel hardtail!



If your letter gets picked as the Star Letter, you'll receive a pair of DMR Vault pedals worth £99.99, courtesy of Upgrade (**www.upgradebikesco.uk**). For full *Mountain Biking UK* terms and conditions, see p14.

Pointless process?

I have a bit of a gripe. If you're going to long-term test a bike, at the end of the year it should still be basically the same bike, just with a few minor upgrades that the average rider might add. I'd like to know how a bike fares over the year, not how great it'll be if I rip it apart and do a total rebuild. The feature shouldn't be classed as a long-term test but be called, 'how to buy a bike, then buy accessories that'll double the cost and give you a totally different bike to the one you bought'. Apart from that, great mag.

MAV, LIVERPOOL

I love reading your reviews every month but I feel compelled to comment on the Team Bikes. We all upgrade our bikes over time, but with some of your bikes you make so many changes that the review is no longer relevant to the original bike. For example, the Specialized Stumpjumper FSR Expert Carbon Evo 29 is a £4,500 bike, yet over the time you had it you 'spent' £4,472 on upgrades. These reviews need to be more realistic. We don't all have freebies from manufacturers to chuck on our new bikes!

KRISTAN MCCLURE, VIA EMAIL

We can see where you're both coming from, but one of the main reasons we hang on to these bikes for a year is so that we have a test bed for review products. We do try to keep any upgrades appropriate – the owner of a £4,500 carbon bike might well consider buying £2,000 carbon wheels, the owner of a £1,500 alloy bike would laugh in your face if you suggested it – but because we ride these bikes so regularly, they're the best tools we have for forming proper comparisons of test kit. We do try to make it clear where parts have been switched for review purposes and where they've been changed due to performance shortfalls.

SOCIAL STUFF

@ MBUK FORUM
www.bikeradar.com/forums

Should e-bikes be allowed on regular trails?

Don't have a problem with them. They're quiet like regular mountain bikes and lack the power to damage the trails like dirt bikes do – **cyd190468**

I've ridden a couple and both had so much torque that the rear wheel was scrabbling and spinning out

Mad-for-it mums

It's time to come clean and let the wider world know that we exist and our numbers are growing. Confused? We're the growing number »

on the climbs, so there's potential for them to chew up the trail way more than a regular bike – **Angus Young**

They'll end up getting bigger, faster and stronger, and that's when the damage will start. If we allow them on the trails from the start, it'll be very hard to stop – **VWsurfbum**

They're unlikely to catch on for proper woodsy singletrack riding because the weight becomes a huge disadvantage on the descents – **jimothy78**

The ones I've ridden have been fun, though I do think they're missing the point of cycling unless the rider has a real need for one. The problem is the idiots who'll build 1,000w monsters – **warpcow**

FACEBOOK
www.facebook.com/MBUKMag

Trail skill you want to master

To look around the berm, not just stare at the apex! – **Kristopher Tovey**

Jumps. Twenty years of riding and anything bigger than a kerb still scares the crap out of me! – **Robert Fairfax**

To go out just once without ending up upside-down in a prickle bush. Just once! – **Daniel Gilbert**

Not falling off the top of berms by going too fast on a £800 bike I ride like a £2.5k bike – **Glenn Mason-Wenn**

To be able to manual the shit outta everything – **Andy Cole**

TWITTER
http://twitter.com/mbukmagazine

Trail that's blown you away?

Kalamunda Circuit, West Oz! – **@widgety_grub**

One of the EWS stages in Glentress – **@jamborambo17**

Hopton's downhill trails – **@tomcradd**

Innerleithen Matador DH – **@mickwilla88**

Blade and Skyline at Glyncorrwg/ Afan Forest. Destroyed two inner tubes. Great fun though – **@TaintedGimp**

of 'women of a certain age' who are just as keen as you whippersnappers to feel the pleasure/pain of the uphill burn and the thrill of the downhill berms. I wouldn't say I'm particularly skilful or at all fast (my biking nickname is Madam Longleat, as I proceed in a rather stately manner), but boy do I have fun. Particularly when those fearless downhillers do a double take. They can't believe someone of my advanced age is in the uplift queue and all armoured up! So if your other half or kids disappear habitually and come back covered in mud, why not get out there yourself?
GWYNETH STEDDY, VIA EMAIL
Good on you Gwyneth – great to hear you're still getting down and dirty with the young 'uns! Age is just a state of mind and all that.

Look before you leap

I read your letters page each month and there's always a tale of serious injury. It strikes me that we need a code of conduct to reduce the number of accidents. My suggestions are:

- Check the trail ahead before attempting serious jumps
- Check your bike is in good order before setting off – QR skewers or through-axles tight, chain running freely, brakes in good order
- Carry a first aid kit and phone
- Don't cycle alone so there's always someone to go for help
- Leave details of where you're going and when you'll be back
- Consider going on a first aid course
- Wear body armour, or at least elbow and knee pads

ANTONY CAM, VIA EMAIL
The CTC's Off-Road Cycling Code of Conduct *sums up most of this in one line: "Always plan ahead – know your bike, your equipment, your ability and the area, and wear appropriate safety gear and a helmet." A bit easier to remember! Definitely worth bearing in mind every time you ride though.*

Wide bar warning

Ronan, my 12-year-old, was delighted to get a wide bar for Christmas. He loves it, claiming better handling and control. There's one big problem though – we now can't get past the bike when he parks it in the hallway.
JOHN WHITE, ISLE OF SKYE
Think that's the biggest problem? Just wait until he tries to make a narrow gap between trees!



RUSSEL NEWHAM soaks in the views on the Isle of Arran, off the south-west coast of Scotland. Pic by **JULIE NIMMO**



If you're going to an old military training ground, you may as well ride a tank of a bike! **JOHN P JONES** takes a fatbike for a spin in the sand and heather of Soltau, Germany. Pic by his friend **STEVE RICHARDSON**



Here's **TOM PITKIN** racing his Saracen Myst at Tavi Woodlands in Devon. Photo by **NIGEL COOK**



ANDY MCAVINEY took this sepia-toned shot of his pals **GLEN** and **NEIL** at the top of Glentress's Spooky Wood and reckons this is what Victorian mountain biking would have looked like

MBUK HARDCORE HERO



RICH PARKES'S girlfriend, **KASIA FISZER**, took this great shot of him (almost looking headless!) sending it on his Diamondback DB-8 on Cleeve Hill in Cheltenham

WIN Effetto tubeless kit

The small print
Email your letters and photos to **mbuk@bikeradar.com**.
- The 'Star Photo' winner will receive a Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive pump worth £89.99.
- The 'That's Gotta Hurt' winner will receive a Lezyne Port-A-Shop toolkit worth £99.99.
- The 'Hardcore Heroes' winner will receive an Effetto Mariposa Caffélatex Tubeless Conversion Kit worth £49.99

Turn to p14 for full *Mountain Biking UK* terms and conditions.

MBUK STAR PHOTO



KEITH BREMNER sent in this brilliant shot of him and his son **KAI** at the Highland Wildcat Trails in Golspie, saying: "My son, who's 12, sold his PS4 and bought a Turner Flux frame with the proceeds. With all his Christmas money and a bit of help he built up an awesome bike. Now he's shredding! Moments like these are priceless."



WHAT YOU COULD WIN...

The Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive track pump is made from durable CNC machined aluminium and has an oversized barrel, piston, hose and connectors to deliver twice as much air per stroke and quickly fill tyres or seat tubeless tyre systems. For more info, visit **www.upgradebikes.co.uk**.



Looks like 15-year-old **NAT BUNNELL** has got wheelies well and truly dialled

MBUK STACK IT



No need for any fakery this month – **ANDY 'ROBBO' ROBINSON'S** GoPro captured this cracking shot of his mate **WAYNE WATSON** in mid flight on a fast descent in the Peaks



GRANT PARKER and his riding buddies take in the view of Ullswater after an awesome ride down Helvellyn and Sticks Pass in the Lakes

MBUK THAT'S GOTTA HURT



We've had our fair share of bruises, but nothing quite like this – **STUART BOWERY** suffered this massive haematoma when he landed arse cheek first on a rock at the recent ND(H)uro race at Hamsterley Forest. He later needed an op to drain the blood and has been left with "a canny scar" but managed to finish the race!

WIN Lezyne tool package



TWEETS OF THE MONTH





Crazy scenes here in Cape Town but thankfully the fires have calmed down for @TheNightHarvest tonight – it's gonna be amazing! DMR's Olly Wilkins is in South Africa for a massive dirt jump comp – and a sky filled with flames is one hell of a backdrop for the action





A little midday entertainment on the shuttle to the top with @brendanhowey who's been scratching away on some large piles of dirt The Coastal Crew's Curtis Robinson admires Brendan Howey's style on one of the bigger jumps at BC's Coast Gravity Park





Tall funny-looking trees! Our columnist Hannah Barnes has been exploring New Zealand and taking in all the crazy flora and fauna





This is #Redbull #VCA2015 Rémy Métailler is as fond of his hashtags as he is of getting wild in the streets of Valparaiso, Chile for the annual urban downhill race

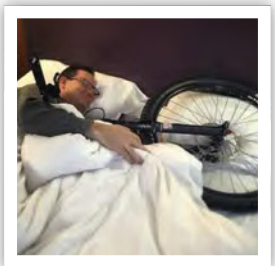




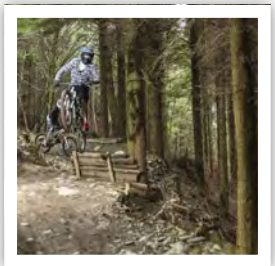
Sweet pic from the @CUBE_ActionTeam camp... Bike and kit is so dialled Scotty Laughland is one of our riders to watch in 2015, and not just because he's easy to spot in his new red and blue race kit

INSTAGRAM

http://instagram.com/mbukmagazine



We all love our bikes, but **@duggana** may be taking things a little too far



@dan_hudson_ proves there's more to Cornwall than pasties and posh surfers

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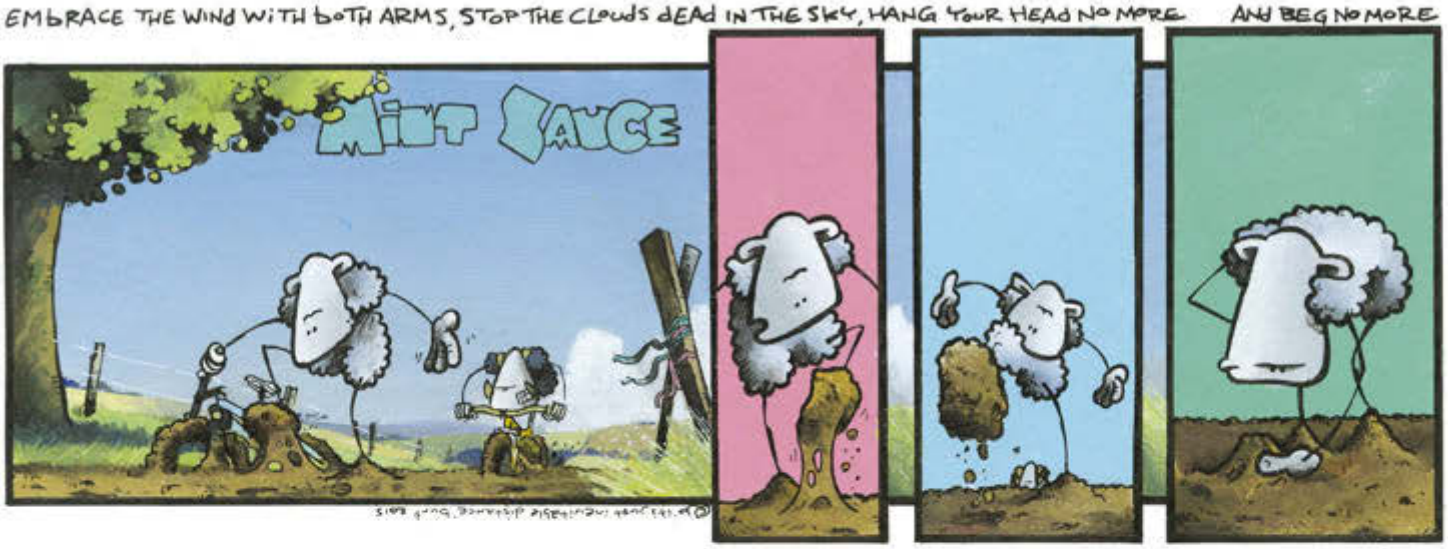
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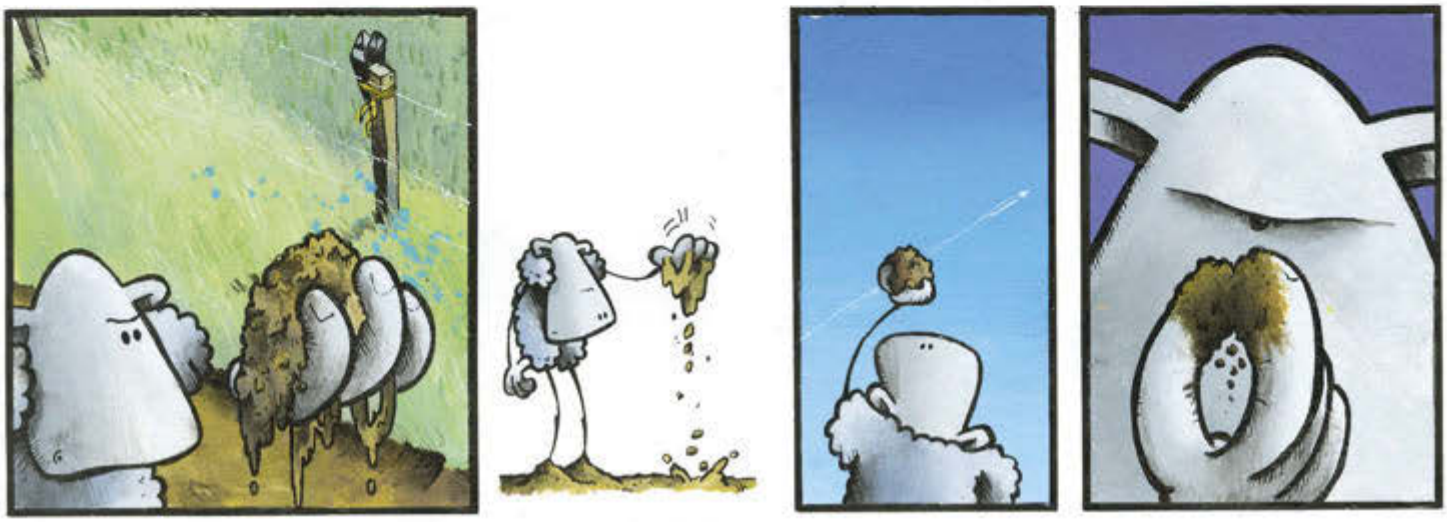
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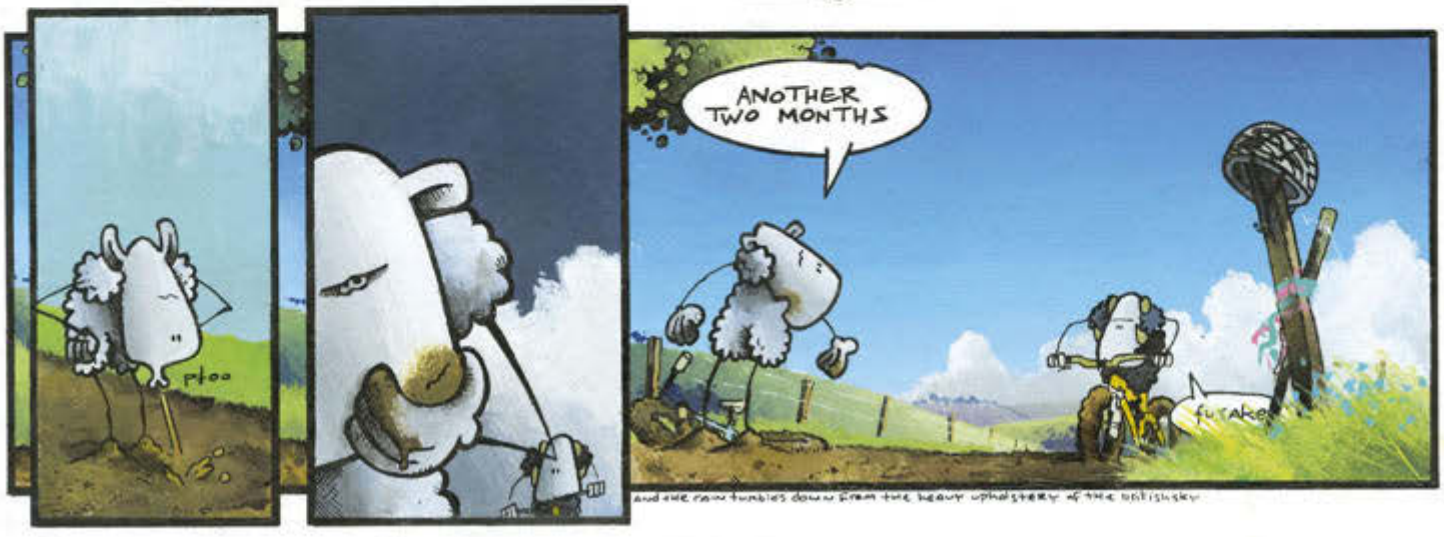
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MBUK FirstRides

FEATURING: Yeti SB5c X01 // NS Movement // Ghost Riot LT 8 LC



The SB5c uses Yeti's new twin-shaft Switch Infinity suspension design



This allows the swingarm to move vertically as well as rotate

YETI SB5C X01

FRAME Carbon fibre, 127mm (5in) travel **FORK** Fox 34 Float CTD FIT w/ Trail Adjust, 140mm (5.5in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Float CTD w/ Trail Adjust **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X1 cranks, X0 rear mech and shifter (1x11) **WHEELSET** DT Swiss 350 hubs on XM 401 rims, Maxxis Ardent 27.5x2.4in (F) and Ikon 27.5x2.2in (R) tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Easton Haven Carbon, 740mm/Thomson Elite, 80mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/WTB Volt **WEIGHT** 12.6kg (27.8lb) **PRICE** £5,799 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com

The SB5c uses Yeti's all-new Switch Infinity suspension system in a bid to create a smile inducing, mile munching and downhill hammering trail bike. We hit the hills to see if it delivers on its promise.

The frame

Switch Infinity has taken nearly three years of development, in collaboration with Fox Racing Shox, and combines the Switch Technology found on Yeti's SB66 and SB95 trail bikes with the linear rail system used on their DH bikes. Sitting just above the bottom bracket, the main pivot is sandwiched between twin Kashima coated tubes that it can move up and down upon, changing how the suspension behaves depending on how much of the 127mm (5in) of travel is being used.

Surrounding this technological nugget is a beautifully sculpted carbon mainframe and swingarm. Neatly externally routed cables make maintenance less of a faff and Yeti have catered for 'stealth' dropper posts too, while integrated down tube and chainstay protectors silence the ride and protect the carbon.

The SB5c leans towards the more aggressive end of the trail riding spectrum, with a 66.5-degree head angle, 340mm BB height and 600mm effective top tube (medium frame).

The kit

Yeti have seen fit to slap a stiffer 34mm (rather than 32mm) stanchioned fork in up front, reinforcing the SB5c's hard riding credentials. The Shimano XT brakes and SRAM 1x11 transmission are hard to fault. With it being so wet lately, we swapped out the stock Maxxis rubber for some more aggressive Hutchinson treads.

The ride

To get a feel for what the Switch Infinity system was capable of, we left the shock in 'descend' mode for most of the test. Hitting the first climb we were impressed straight away. Things remain efficient and relatively stable as you grind away at the pedals, yet the back end continues to eke out any available traction. There's enough cockpit room to fit a shorter stem too, without upsetting the Yeti's ability to claw up steep inclines.

Hit the downs and the SB5c is eager to pick up speed. It covers ground with good pace and masses of efficiency. Point it straight down a rocky trail or across a chattery carpet of roots and it's surprising just how easily the rear swallows up the big hits, passing on limited feedback through the bike and letting you get on with the job at hand.

There's enough progression out back and aggressive enough angles to let you ride the SB5c harder than you think you should too. It's an incredibly capable trail bike that likes to be ridden fast. And in case you were wondering, after a good few months of hard riding in terrible weather, the Switch Infinity system is showing no signs of wear. **ROB**

FirstRides RATED

An incredibly capable, efficient and fast trail bike. Yeti's racing pedigree certainly shines through in the SB5c

★★★★½

FirstRides Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL:** A genuine class leader

★★★★½ **VERY GOOD:** One of the best you can buy

★★★☆☆ **GOOD:** It'll do the job and do it well

★★☆☆☆ **BELOW AVERAGE:** Flawed in some way

★☆☆☆☆ **POOR:** Simply put, don't bother!





↑ The BMX influenced geometry means the Movement is perfect for skate parks

↓ The DJ3 fork takes the sting out of landings but weighs an awful lot



NS MOVEMENT

FRAME Custom formed and butted 6061-T6 aluminium **FORK** Marzocchi Dirt Jumper 3, 100mm (3.9in) travel **DRIVETRAIN** SALT cranks w/ 25t chainring (1x1) **WHEELSET** Joytech nutted front hub, Octane One Single Speed Pro 11t rear hub, NS Fundamental rims, Kenda Small Block 8 26x2.1in tyres **BRAKES** Avid DB1 rear, Tektro Novela front **BAR/STEM** NS Lick, 740mm/NS Quantum, 37mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** Octane One Fat/Octane One Fat **WEIGHT** 12.9kg (28.4lb) with pedals **PRICE** £799.99 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

NS are known for their compact steel-framed jump bikes, so when the aluminium Movement appeared we were keen to swing a leg over it and see how it handled at the skate park and down at the dirt jumps.

The frame

The 6061-T6 aluminium frame takes its geometry (and colour scheme) from the slightly more expensive steel Metropolis 2, and it's only the larger diameter tubeset that sets the two bikes apart visually. The straight head tube only accepts 1.125in steerers, which limits future fork upgrade options. There are cable guides in case you want to add a rear mech and a hanger is supplied with the bike. We'd have preferred to have had a set of chain tugs included because there aren't any integrated into the frame.



↑ Though NS provide a mech hanger, there are no chain tugs supplied with the bike

The kit

The heavy Marzocchi DJ3 fork has no rebound adjustment and only a couple of Allen key turns of spring preload, but performed reasonably well. The quick-release dropouts with 15mm nutted hubs were annoying when we punctured or needed to load the bike into a car though, and mean that upgrading the fork will require a new front hub too. The 3in rise of the own-brand Lick bar looks massive but complemented the riding style of the frame well. The Kenda Small Block 8 tyres performed flawlessly.

The ride

The Movement's stumpy 385mm chainstays and steep (by trail bike standards) 69-degree head angle might make it feel fast and twitchy to a novice. But in the hands of an experienced rider, this geometry allows you to throw the bike into spins and make shapes in the air with ease.

Carving tight, technical lines at the skate park is where the Movement really feels at home. While a dirt jump bike with a mountain-bike-influenced design might feel too long and low and make it a struggle to pop out of tight transitions, the BMX-style geometry of the Movement lets you boost, whip and launch every obstacle.

The Movement is a blast when you're firing out laps at the BMX track too, but it's definitely a bike that's more about getting sideways in the air than out-and-out speed. The compact 1,037mm wheelbase makes pumping the backsides of dirt jumps or hammering pump track loops a rapid, fun affair.

The main thing slowing the Movement down is the weighty Marzocchi fork. Although it takes the sting out of heavy landings and softens sharp transitions when street riding, having to pick up 2.75kg of fork takes some of the fun out of the ride. We plugged in a rigid jump fork weighing 650g less for comparison, and the bike was transformed into a fun, floaty, easy-to-ride street machine.

While some taller riders might prefer something more stable and with a little more cockpit room, it's always great to get on a fast handling, easily chuckable bike like the Movement that'll keep you on your toes. **JONNY**

FirstRides RATED

Quick-handling pro dirt jump bike with a disappointing fork but excellent finishing kit

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↑ The LT gets a bigger fork and wider bar than the regular Riot, plus a dropper post

↓ The Cane Creek DBInline shock rewards careful tuning with top-end performance



GHOST RIOT LT 8 LC

FRAME Carbon fibre, 130mm (5.1in) travel **FORK** Fox 34 TALAS CTD FIT Performance, 150/120mm (4.7/5.9in) travel **SHOCK** Cane Creek Double Barrel Inline **DRIVETRAIN** Shimano Deore XT (2x10) **WHEELSET** Race Face Turbine wheels, Schwalbe Hans Dampf Evo TrailStar TE 27.5x2.25in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Ghost Low Rizer SL, 740mm/Ghost AS-GH3, 60mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** KS LEV Integra/Selle Royal Seta **WEIGHT** 12.9kg (28.4lb) without pedals **PRICE** £4,099.99 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

Ghost's carbon-framed Riot hinted at aggressive trail riding potential when we tested it last year, and this Long Travel version is a recipe for real Rioting if you take the time to tune it right.

The frame

A massive multi-faceted down tube links the chunky head tube to the BB 'basket' that holds the lower Riot linkage. The rear brake bolts to a separate plate that sits on the 142x12mm rear axle, just behind the chainstay pivots. Weight is impressively low, yet there's only a hint of flex when cornering at full gas.



↑ The chunky carbon frame is headed up by a multi-faceted head tube with neat internal routing

The kit

The Riot LT gets a 150mm (5.9in) travel Fox 34 TALAS fork – droppable to 120mm/4.7in for the climbs – in place of the 130mm (5.1in) Fox 32 Float of the standard bike, plus a short stem, 740mm bar and dropper post. The 130mm of rear travel is unchanged and is handled by a Cane Creek DBInline shock. Shimano's dependable XT provides the stop and go kit. Race Face Turbine wheels put a broad footing under trustworthy Schwalbe Hans Dampf rubber, and both will go tubeless easily.

The ride

While some long-travel conversions on lightweight frames fail to be convincing, the Riot's solid front end makes it a good fit for a bigger fork. The Performance spec Fox 34 does OK too – it's a bit linear under braking/cornering loads but consistently damped and stiff enough to stay controlled when the trails gets more exciting.

The Cane Creek shock changes the feel of the bike dramatically, providing a real contrast to Riots we've ridden with pedalling-prioritised Fox dampers. You can set this super-tunable shock up tight and efficient or make it super-plush and rely on the 'climb' lever and the progressive end stroke that the Riot Link creates.

It's worth spending time tuning it, because once dialled, the Riot LT is a great all-round trail bike. While it's not full on 'enduro', the handling is well balanced and it's burly enough to put its shoulder into serious terrain when needed. Tuned right, the shock amplifies back end control well beyond regular 130mm performance so you can drive the Ghost hard through trouble.

Flick the 'climb' lever, drop the fork and you've got an impressively lightweight, responsive and rapid machine for nailing serious climbs. This is a bike we'd be happy to ride whatever the terrain or distance the day had in store. **GUY**

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First Look
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SHORT-TRAVEL TRAIL bikes have always been a big part of the fun-seeking UK riding scene, and the new Spider 275 from Intense looks to fit the bill nicely. A reworked lower VPP link allows for short (419mm) chainstays that should give a fun and snappy cornering feel. A fairly long front centre points at good stability at speed and the rear travel can be set to 115mm (4.5in) for poppy pedalling, or 130mm (5.1in) to match the front. Grease ports should keep the frame running smoothly through UK weather too. This entry-level Foundation Build complete bike weighs in at 13.9kg (30.7lb) and comes with solid Shimano componentry, X-Fusion suspension and fast-rolling Maxxis Ardent tyres.

£2,999 Extra UK www.extrauk.co.uk

MAXXIS GRIFFIN DH TYRE

WE FIRST SAW a prototype of this tyre on the rear wheel of Jared Graves's Yeti at last year's Enduro World Series finals, where he clinched the overall title. Available for 26in and 650b wheels, and with a full-fat dual-ply DH casing and 2.4in width, it's aimed squarely at the gravity market and designed as a fast-rolling dry weather option. The relatively low and highly ramped centre tread is designed to minimise rolling resistance, while alternating shoulder tread blocks should provide a predictable cornering feel. It's available in two compounds – Super Tacky and 3C Maxx Grip.

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HALO VAPOUR CARBON WHEELS

GOOD LUCK EXPLAINING this to anyone unfamiliar with high-end MTB kit, but a set of carbon wheels for under £1,000 could almost be described as a bargain! The Vapour Carbons aren't short of features either. The rims have a broad 28mm internal width for improved tyre stability and are laced to own-brand hubs with 32 double-butted spokes. The SD6F front hub comes with adaptors for 20mm, 15mm or QR axles. Out back there are two options – the Spin Doctor 6-Drive hub provides 12-degree engagement and comes with adaptors for QR and 142x12mm axles, while the Supa Drive costs £10 more but offers near-instant three-degree pick-up, though you'll have to pay £15 for an axle kit if your frame doesn't have a QR rear end. The Vapour Carbons are available in 26in, 650b or 29in sizes and can be run tubeless if you add rim strips. Stay tuned to find out if our 1,757g 650b samples are tough enough!

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SuperBike MBUK

#53 Gary Forrest's Ibis Mojo HD3

WHY IS THIS A SUPER BIKE?

- Ibis make some of the most desirable trail bikes in the world. As one of their fastest enduro riders' race bike, this is the finest machine they offer.
- Own-brand carbon rims create a tyre profile that gives incredible grip and makes the impossible possible.
- Prototype shock coupled with the latest iteration of the DW-Link suspension design capitalises on that insane grip.

Gary finds his Mojo

New bike takes Scottish enduro hope from digger driver to factory rider

There are some bikes that are all about stealthy finishes, matt graphics and subtle lines. Then there are bikes like Gary Forrest's Ibis Mojo HD3, which screams speed and begs for neck-snapping attention the minute it breaks cover. One of the first in the country, this particular 650b wheeled, carbon fibre Mojo is handcrafted for just one thing – winning Enduro World Series stages. "It's an absolute weapon," says Gary, smiling the smile of a team rider who knows his bike is fast, and isn't simply toeing the PR line.

Gary first met Ibis owner Scot Nicol at the Val d'Isere round of the EWS. The two stayed in touch and now they're set to take on the world together. This will be the Tweed Valley rider's first full factory ride, despite him coming through the British DH ranks with the likes of Madison Saracen's Matt Simmonds. The frame itself is everything we've come to expect from Ibis over the »

Words Ric McLaughlin **Pics** Mick Kirkman



WHO IS GARY FORREST?

Gary raced downhill from an early age up until he felt the need to take a couple of years off to, in his own words, "drink beer and ride road bikes". The 28-year-old Peebles native is now the number one rider (well, perhaps behind Anne-Caro...) on the Ibis EWS outfit, having already scored top 10 results before going full-time pro.

SHOCKINGLY SECRET STUFF

Even Gary doesn't know what's going on inside his rear shock. The triple-chamber X-Fusion prototype sports a hand-signed sticker and arrived with a set of suggested settings. Gary has been blown away so far though, and will continue giving feedback to the team at the races.

YOU CAN GO YOUR OWN WAY

Ibis believe that, simply put, Shimano make the best brakes and SRAM the best drivetrains, so that's what their team and production bikes get. Gary goes for Shimano XTR Trail brakes and SRAM XX1 shifting. He increases his disc rotor sizes for longer enduro stages.

BIG RINGS

Race Face provide the Ibis team with cranks and chainrings. For training Gary has been running a 32t direct-mount narrow/wide ring on Next SL cranks, but reckons he may swap to a 36t number when racing gets underway.



PLUMBING PERFECTION
On the old Mojo, cables were routed along the top tube via crotch-worryingly sharp carbon fibre guides. Now Ibis have decided to better show off those beautiful lines with internal routing for everything.

35MM IS ALL IT TAKES
It mightn't sound like much but an internal rim width of 35mm is massive. Match that to carbon fibre construction and DT Swiss hubs and you have the Ibis 741 wheelset. The larger volume equals lower tyre pressures and therefore more grip to offer maximum line choice.

SOFT AND SUPPLE
Jump on a pro downhiller's bike and you'll struggle to move the suspension, but Gary's Ibis felt more like a trail bike to us. He runs things a bit more supple to save him from fatigue on long stages, and runs his rebound quicker on the front than on the rear.

years, combining beautiful lines with fastidious attention to detail. It offers 150mm (5.9in) of rear wheel travel via the latest incarnation of Dave Weagle's DW-Link suspension design, and those clean lines draped in bright cyan paint are shown off thanks to internal cabling. The rear brake line is run externally though, for easier brake swaps and repairs.

Unusually for a boutique brand, Ibis have chosen to equip the HD3 with own-brand wheels. These are no ordinary hoops though – the Ibis 741s use meaty looking carbon fibre rims with a whopping 35mm internal width. The increased tyre volume that this extra width provides has changed how much pressure Gary can get away with – he's down to 20psi – and he reckons the extra grip from the lower pressures and larger contact patch opens up myriad new line choices, making once inaccessible inside lines fair game.

Testing times

Gary has a factory tuned 150mm (5.9in) travel X-Fusion Sweep fork up front. "I run it slightly softer than a lot of people expect," he says. "I'm not riding DH tracks looking for half a second, I'm riding for over an hour, so it's easier on my arms." Out back is something rather special and slightly mysterious – a blacked-out prototype shock that arrived hand-signed along with some suggested pressures. Gary was remaining tight-lipped, but it looks like the shock uses two separate reservoirs that run into a single main central chamber. Ibis supply X-Fusion suspension as OEM kit on many of their stock bikes so development feedback is sure to be being exchanged.

Gary's spec sheet is unusual for a team rider in that he's actually got a wide choice of components. In accordance with Ibis's thinking, he uses Shimano brakes and a 1x11 SRAM drivetrain – what they see as the best performing brands in each field. SRAM XX1 is a showstopper and offers an industry-leading spread of gears and superior chain retention, while Shimano's XTR Trail brakes offer razor sharp deceleration and next-level heat haemorrhaging. Likewise, he can use either Maxxis or Schwalbe tyres. Though the bike is shod with the former when we shoot it, Gary reckons a swap back to Schwalbe is probably on the cards to take advantage of a wider spread of enduro-specific models. He'll then stick with that for the season.

With 15 races including the full smattering of EWS rounds as well as the UEC European Enduro Champs, Gary has a packed 2015 ahead aboard the Mojo. He's training harder than ever and looking forward to playing his cards right when the beeps start.

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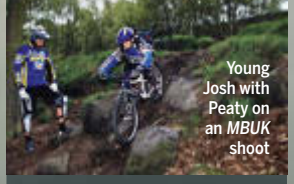




THE RAT IS BACK

Josh 'Ratboy' Bryceland has raced mountain bikes since the age of 10. After winning the World Cup overall last year, he's now got his sights set on the World Champs

Words and pics Steve Behr



Young Josh with Peaty on an *MBUK* shoot

DID YOU KNOW?

RAT FACTS

1 Lives on his own narrowboat in a boatyard owned by his dad
2 Special race/training diet: "I eat when I'm hungry and drink when I'm thirsty"
3 Middle names are Antonio Torres, after his Spanish grandfather on his mum's side
4 He's partial to wearing vests
5 Lied about his age to get on to his first *MBUK* photoshoot with Steve Peat (see pic above)

He was good for a grommet, but there was no way of telling back then just how good he'd turn out to be

There was less than half a second in it. Santa Cruz Syndicate rider Josh 'Ratboy' Bryceland looked set to crown an already remarkable 2014 season with a World Championship win at Hafjell in Norway – on top of the World Cup overall title he'd sealed two weeks before in Méribel. He was over a second up on fellow Brit Gee Atherton at the last split, and flying as he approached the finish. All he had to do was clear the last bridge jump and cross the finish line to be world champ. All he had to do – sounds so simple when you write it down. The crowd was cheering. On the Red Bull live stream Rob Warner's voice rose to a falsetto. "Surely the Ratboy is... Oh my god! Bryceland flat-lands! He's gone sooo big over the bridge!"

Josh hit the bridge fast. Too fast. He overjumped it and landed on the flat, breaking his foot before coasting across the finish line into second place, less than half a second behind Gee.

"I had no idea I was ahead. I didn't think I'd had a good run," he recalls. "I didn't realise I was going quite as quick as I was. I'd braked every time in practice to do a whip and hadn't really practised hitting it fast." Schoolboy error. He'd sustained a Lisfranc fracture of the foot, breaking the bones in the midfoot. "I knew straight away it was knackered!" Josh was whisked off to hospital and operated on that night in Norway. And after three-and-a-half months of non-weight-bearing recovery, he's back on the scene.

Miami Bryce

Let's rewind a sec. Who is Josh Antonio Torres Bryceland? (His exotic name is down to his Spanish grandad.) We first came across him when he was just a grommet. He turned up with his dad's mate Andy Kyffin, Steve Peat's mechanic at the time, in the late 1990s on an *MBUK* feature photoshoot with Peaty. He reckons he was about nine years old, and tiny. Peaty thinks he said he was older and lied about his age to get him on the shoot. "He'll be good," they said. He *was* good, for a grommet, but there was no way of telling back then just how good he'd turn out to be. Peaty has always been a mentor to younger riders, and in due course took young Bryceland under his wing and had him on the Royal/Orange team with Brendan Fairclough. When Peaty moved to Santa Cruz in 2006 he took Ratboy with him on a frame-only deal. Santa Cruz main man Rob Roskopp offered Josh a Syndicate deal for 2008, and he and Peaty (and South African triple world champ Greg Minnaar) have been teammates ever since.

Josh was always a rider in the Peaty mould – exceptionally talented, he likes to ride hard and party hard. Nick Bayliss, the Royal Racing designer, came up with his first nickname, Miami Bryce. But Ratboy has proved more enduring. "Sam Dale [fellow downhiller and sometime training partner] came up with it in 2008 and Peaty jumped on it and it's just stuck," laughs Josh. As he grew and progressed up the age groups, he was clearly a rider destined to go places. Junior world champ in 2008 at Val di Sole, he was favourite to win in 2007 at Fort William too, but had a flat on his run and lost out to fellow Brit Ruaridh Cunningham.



After injury time off the bike, Josh is ready for the 2015 season

Breakthrough year

The jump from junior champ to senior World Cup winner is often a difficult one. Josh got on the podium in second place at Mont-Sainte-Anne in 2011, but failed to make a real impression on the overall rankings till last year. "It's a difficult jump, but especially now that the juniors don't race with us any more I think it's going to be even more difficult for them" says Josh.

So is he changing? The perception is that he's the lad – having a laugh, mucking about with Peaty and #allthelads, styling it up on his runs. Did he tone that down to achieve success last year?

"No!" he asserts. "If anything, I mucked about more this year than ever, but I just got my head down when I needed to. I've always trained hard but now I'm stronger mentally. That's the »

WINNING FORM

TIMELINE OF MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

2006	1st European Champs (Youth)
2007	1st UCI World Cup, series overall (Junior)
2008	1st British National Champs (Junior)
	1st UCI World Champs, Val di Sole (Junior)
2011	2nd UCI World Cup, Mont-Sainte-Anne
2012	3rd UCI World Cup, Val d'Isère
	5th UCI World Cup, Fort William
	6th UCI World Cup, series overall
2013	5th UCI World Cup, Leogang
2014	1st UCI World Cup, Leogang
	1st UCI World Cup, Windham
	1st UCI World Cup, series overall
	2nd UCI World Cup, Mont-Sainte-Anne
	2nd UCI World Cup, Cairns
	3rd UCI World Cup, Méribel
	2nd UCI World Champs, Hafjell



I used to qualify well then go up the hill for the final and shit myself. Having a mental routine makes all the difference

hardest thing to learn," Josh reckons, referring to the mental toughness and techniques needed to succeed at the highest level. He's been working with sport psychologist Dr Rob Copeland for a few years now, the same guy who helped Peaty.

"I needed to learn what was going on, then practise and practise the techniques he gave me. I used to qualify well, then go up the hill for the final and shit myself. Experience helps too, but having a mental routine, making as many things similar as you can each time, makes all the difference," he explains. "Control what you can and don't give a f*** about what you can't!"

Syndicate manager Kathy Sessler says: "I've watched Josh mature in every way through the years. In 2014 I witnessed a huge mental leap in Josh's growth in racing. He now has the knowledge that he can win races at the highest level."

And because he's been doing well, he's allowed himself a bit more time to let his (abundant) hair down. "If I've been doing badly I usually deprive myself, but after winning at Leogang I went on a bit of a bender," he says. "I remember Sam Dale telling someone at British Cycling about it and them saying that it would be the last one I'd win for a while. Ha!" he laughs, with some degree of satisfaction.

It must be hard to avoid the mucking-about side, on the Syndicate with Steve and Greg. »

RIDE LIKE THE RAT

JOSH'S TOP TIPS FOR RACEDAY PREP

- Be certain of the lines you're going to ride so that you can enter every section fully committed.
- **Don't worry about what your competitors are doing if it has no effect on your race. Focus on your own performance being the best it can. You can compare results afterwards.**
- Follow faster riders for perspective on lines and to drag you up to speed. It is important to do some runs on your own too though.
- **I do a lot of visualisation on race day, especially if I'm nervous. I'll have music on during the uplift and my warm-up, and be doing runs of the track in my head so that I'm 100 per cent dialled in for the race run.**
- Breathing is key. It's easy to hold your breath without even realising it.

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Peaty puts it this way: "As a racer he's definitely matured. As a person he's still immature. That's what I like about him!"

"Yeah, they're both hard chargers – if you don't take part and you leave early you get a lot of grief!" he says, though you get the feeling they'd probably say the same about Josh.

Peaty puts it this way: "As a racer he's definitely matured. As a person he's still immature. That's what I like about him!" He adds: "He's still got the fun side, which is why he's so good to ride with, but he's finally found his right mix and knows when to turn it on." A good combination to have.

Graft and grins

So does Josh feel he's getting the results he deserves? "I don't think anyone deserves results. You earn them. It's hard work!" he says. "I've been at the same intensity of work and training for the past three or four years, but I've got stronger and fitter over time and mentally more able to cope."

Josh is looking forward to the challenges of the coming season. It was hard being off the bike for so long and it won't be easy to achieve full fitness, but he's riding hard again now and training well. "I've set the Bronson up as my XC bike and did a 15-mile loop yesterday in the worst conditions!" he laughs. "It took me ages 'cos it was so muddy, but I loved it!"

And with the Syndicate's professional set-up he doesn't have to worry about much other than getting himself fit and riding. "All I have to do is ride my bike. Between Kathy [Sessler] and Doug [Hatfield, team mechanic] I don't have to do anything. I just turn up and roll down the hill..."

That also sounds simple when you write it down. It isn't, but Josh has a way of making things seem effortless, an art in itself. "At heart he's a pure racer," says Peaty. "He has fun at the right time, and gets serious at the right time. No one sees him when he's serious, so he makes it look easy."



Josh's home – not bad for a barge!

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FLYING SAUZE

Enduro bike nirvana in the Italian Alps

Words Phil Shucksmith **Pics** Matt Wragg



You don't want to overcook a corner like this because it's a long way down...

My brother Sam and I used to salivate at the sight of super-steep and rocky terrain where we could put our eight inches of travel to the test and smash our downhill bikes through everything in our path. Today that just doesn't seem that appealing. Now it's fast flowing natural trails where we can get off the brakes and really let our trail bikes run that get me stoked me – and it looks like there's no shortage of those here in the Italian Alps.

Alfonso's Revenge

We're here in Sauze d'Oulx (pronounced 'sau-zee doux'), just over the border from France, to check out the area's riding, and it doesn't take us long to see the potential for building great tracks on these mountainsides. The lighter coloured rock and less luxuriant vegetation point to a drier climate than much of the Alps – never a bad thing for a mountain biker – and long ridgelines and moderate gradients provide the opportunity to build really long, flowing trails.

Excited to check the place out, we get the bikes out of the hire car and head straight to the ski lift. I love it when places live up to their stereotypes. There to greet us, take our money and put our bikes on the lift is the archetypal Italian farmer, going by the name of Alfonso – sun-weathered skin, dungarees, bushy moustache and a big fat cigar that says "sod you, Brussels, and your ban on smoking in the workplace".

One high-speed chairlift transports us from the bottom of the town to three-quarters of the way up the mountain, »

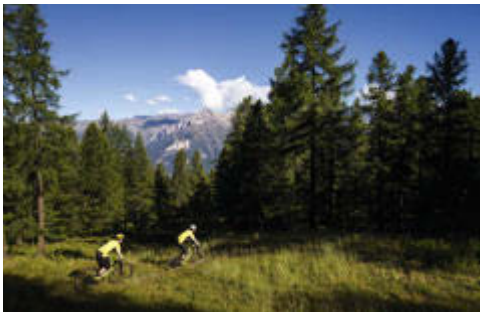


You can easily reach Sauze d'Oulx from Geneva or Turin airports

There to put our bikes on the lift is the archetypal Italian farmer – dungarees and bushy moustache



Villages are postcard pretty (coordinating your kit with the pot plants is optional)





It feels like you're on top of the world – in more ways than one



You get to enjoy a variety of terrain during the runs

THE LOWDOWN

SAUZE D'OULX

THE RIDING

It would be possible to ride all of the tracks in one or two days because the area isn't that big. The tracks are long though, so there's at least four days of riding on offer before you start to get to know the trails. Our suggestion would be to hire a car so you can drive to the other trail areas of the Alpi Bike Resort. The tracks are fun on both DH and enduro bikes.

THE TOWN

Sauze d'Oulx is busier in summer than a lot of winter resorts, but the range of activities outside of riding is fairly limited. The old town is stunning and well worth taking a look at.

RESTAURANTS

Unsurprisingly there are a few good Italian joints in town.

NIGHTLIFE

Alfonso and his mates in a bar is about as lively as it's going to get!

GETTING THERE

The most regular flights from the UK go to Geneva airport in the summer, which is 2hrs 20mins from Sauze. Turin is the nearest airport.

COST

Generally prices are pretty reasonable. Lift passes are €20 per day and there's a discount for multi-day passes. Accommodation is at the lower end of the alpine price range.


There are switchbacks galore on the Sauze tracks


Speed demons can get their fix on the trails here

The first straight descends a rocky ridge – we hit 35mph

with a second, slightly more leisurely chair carrying us to the very top. From there, there's a choice of three runs, which at the middle lift station then split into five runs. With no signpost to tell us otherwise, we set off on a run that I'm going to call Alfonso's Revenge in honour of our lift operator friend.

Flat out, foot out

Talk about a way to get your adrenaline pumping! Up above the treeline, the first straight descends a rocky ridge for 300m and, except for the occasional partially blind rise, there's no need to be on the brakes at all. We hit 35mph straight off the bat. Next up is a 100m gentle rising sprint along a stunning ridge before we drop into some steep switchbacks naturally eroded into the open mountainside.

After descending into some open woodland where the gradient mellows and we buzz alongside a quiet stream, it's back out into the open, this time with flat-out grass corners making the most of the natural undulations of the slope. Flat out, foot out, wind blowing in your hair – now this is living!

Arriving at the middle lift station, we get a brief rest as we roll down a dirt road to the next set of tracks. Now we're really talking! Heading into a pine forest, we're straight into a succession of mellow flat corners followed by a flat-out straight into a catch berm. For simplicity's sake, we name this track Alfonso Returns.

Fast and loose

The following section is packed with perfectly crafted berms and rollers. Then abruptly the composition of the soil seems to change to become looser and more stony, and the manmade features cease and are »


As well as awesome riding, the scenery isn't too shabby either



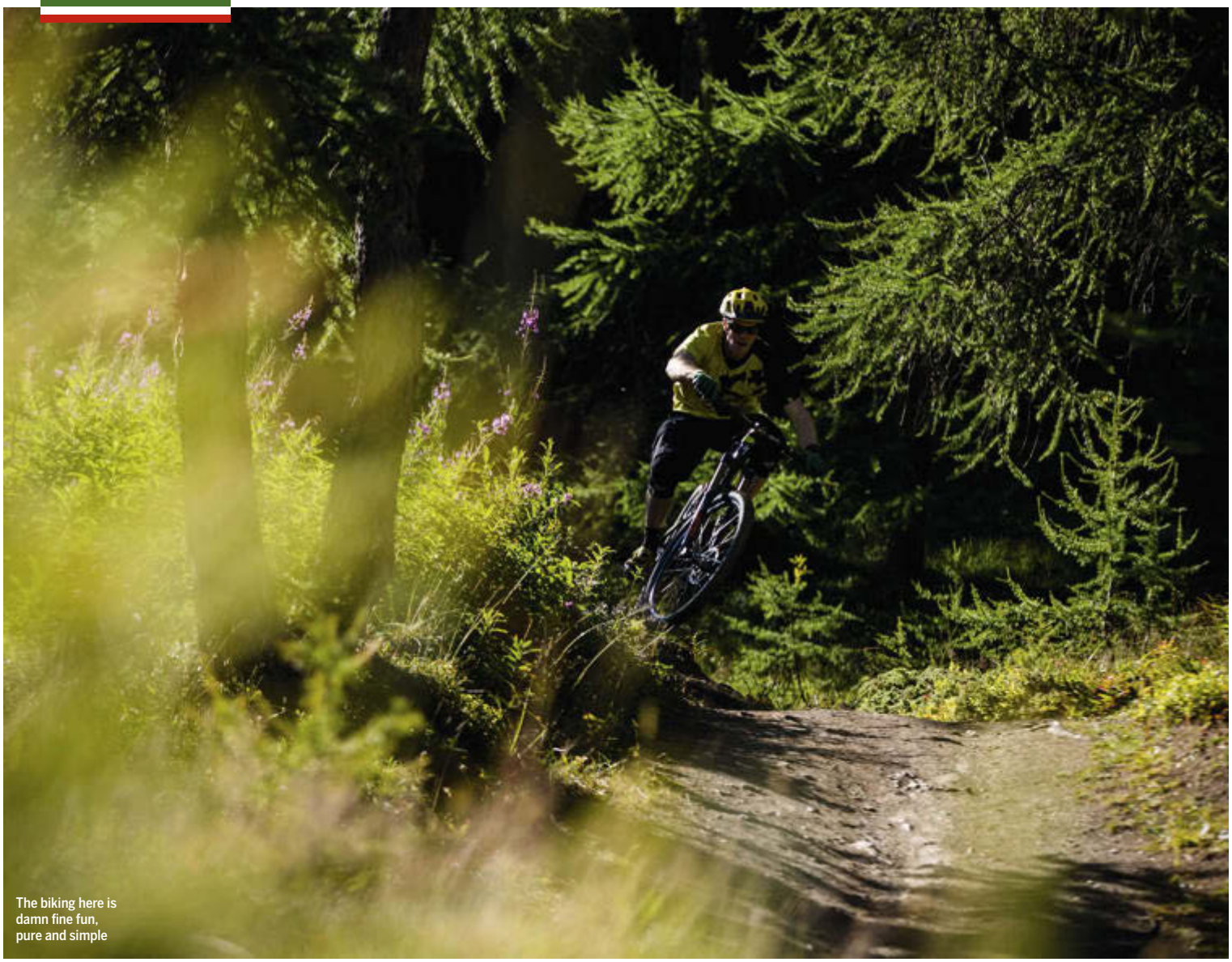
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The biking here is damn fine fun, pure and simple

Naturally bermed switchbacks wind down the ravine...

replaced by loose off-camber turns. Probably the best part of 20 minutes after we set off from the top of the mountain, we're hurtling down super-fast alpine footpaths back towards the town.

Gully run

We soon work out that the best way to enjoy Sauze's trails is to mix and match the top and bottom sections of the tracks, using the fireroad halfway down to transition between them. Our second favourite run – which we really rate because of its variation in terrain – has a bottom section that runs down under the main chairlift.

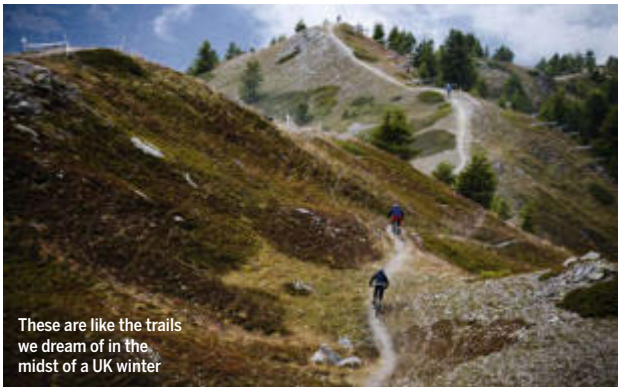
The top of the track is characterised by naturally bermed switchbacks as it winds down a ravine, while the lower section is full of intense, steep, rocky straights that demand full concentration just when your body is begging for time out.

So would we recommend Sauze d'Oulx earns a place on the shortlist for your next riding trip? You bet we would!

As a small resort off the beaten track, it doesn't have to contend with high volumes of riders so the tracks remain in notably better condition than at the bigger biking hotspots. It's got just a handful of awesome long runs rather than a vast network of lift-connected trails, but it's part of the larger Alpi Bike Resort area, which also includes Bardonecchia, Sestriere and Prali, all just a short drive away.



There are plenty of opportunities to get the roost flying



These are like the trails we dream of in the midst of a UK winter



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FULCRUM

DAVE AND GOLIATH

World Cup mechanic and suspension perfectionist Dave Garland is on a mission to create the perfect rear shock. We caught up with him at BikePark Wales to find out just how he's going about it

Words Rob Weaver **Pics** Steven Behr



Hidden away in the boot of Dave Garland's unassuming Citroën Saxo sits the culmination of years of hard graft on the World Cup circuit and a wealth of experience from the automotive suspension industry. We peer into the back of the car to inspect the finely engineered damper unit more closely – and attempt to shelter from the blizzard-like conditions – as Dave explains how he and his business partner, Franco Fratton of Extreme Racing Shox, ended up getting into the world of mountain bike suspension manufacturing.

"Two-and-a-half years ago I decided to make my childhood dream of owning a proper works rally car come true and went out and bought a Citroën Saxo Super 1600 kit car," he says. "I needed some tarmac suspension for it and tracked down the company that built that suspension for Citroën, as they still do now. That was Extreme Racing Shox and Franco Fratton, who's one of the key people in the world of car and motorcycle racing suspension. He found out that I was working with mountain bike suspension and asked if I'd be interested in working on a project building a downhill shock."

Fast-forward to today, and what's carefully being fixed to my bike is a real work of art. Everything from the beautifully machined body to the intricately finished adjustment dials screams attention to detail. It doesn't take long for Dave to put his years of World Cup spannering to »



Dave proudly displays the two EXT shocks – the Arma (DH) and Storia (enduro)



WHO IS DAVE GARLAND?

Dave is the founder of suspension tuning company Stendec Works, as well as being one of the top mechanics on the World Cup downhill circuit. He's spannered for the likes of Chris Kovarik as well as, more recently, 2011 world champion Danny Hart. For 2015, Dave continues to work with Giant Bicycles and has just returned from pre-season testing with their enduro and downhill teams. Check out **www.stendecworks.com** for more on tuning and the new EXT shocks.



Dave works his magic fettling the shock on Rob's bike



Rob gives the EXT Storia shock a thorough workout over the jumps at BikePark Wales

good use and get the shock bolted on and set up, ready for me to hit the trail.

Taking on Goliath

After repeatedly hammering the toughest rock garden BikePark Wales has to offer, I return to Dave's Saxo so he can fettle the shock's settings further. While he's busy tinkering I dig a little deeper into the background of the EXT shock I'm riding.

"I've been lucky to work with a lot of suspension manufacturers, so I had a good idea what we'd be up against," says Dave, knowingly. I raise an eyebrow. A good knowledge base and sound understanding of suspension is one thing, but taking on well established companies like Fox and RockShox at their own game is something else altogether.

Fortunately for Dave, Extreme Racing Shox have been at the top of the suspension game in the car and motorcycle racing industry for years, producing dampers for the likes of Citroën, Ferrari and Williams. It's safe to say Franco knows a thing or two. "We knew that between us we could come up with something more efficient than what's out there at the moment," says Dave. "I'm not saying the suspension out there is all bad – it's not, it's really good – but what sets us apart from other manufacturers is that we've set out to make something that's the best it can possibly be for the individual, that they won't need to get rid of or replace. It's future proof.

> "We knew we could come up with a **more efficient shock** than what's out there"

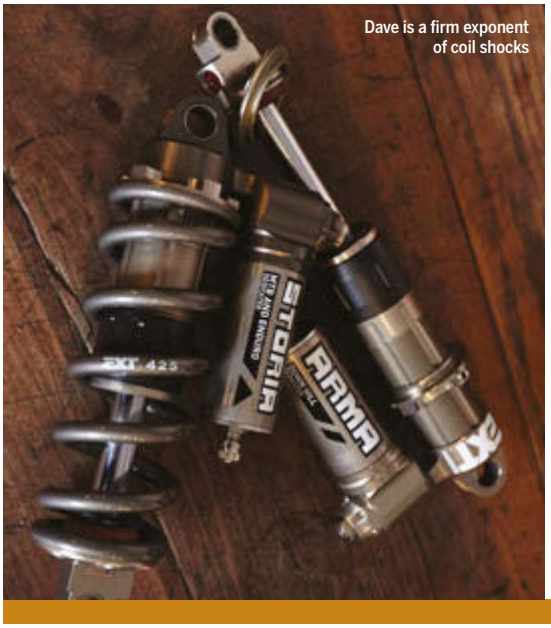
"It's unfair to say that other suspension manufacturers don't do a great job because they do," he continues. "But they're bound by pricing and volume. They need a damper to be made to a certain price point and in high quantities. With mass produced suspension you lose a certain amount of that perfection just because of the beast that it is." Dave and Franco, on the other hand, have no such restrictions, originally planning to create just 500 shocks in the Extreme Racing Shox facility.

Simple but effective

Dave joins us back up on the hill, with a couple of tools in his pocket just in case we need to make any final adjustments. We've already fiddled with the low-speed compression settings quite a bit, and I'm surprised just how much difference a couple of clicks is making to the bike's behaviour on the trail. "We wanted a very usable range of high- and low-speed compression adjustment so the rider could feel the difference, whether they make a big or small adjustment," Dave says.

Both EXT shocks – the Storia (enduro) and Arma (downhill) – are relatively simple. Both feature high- and low-speed compression adjustment, along with a rebound dial, and the coil springs come in 25lb increments to help make tuning that bit





Dave is a firm exponent of coil shocks

COIL OVER AIR

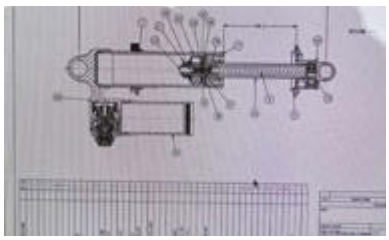
While the big players in the suspension business are all touting air shocks for enduro racing both EXT shocks are coil. Controversial? Maybe, but Dave has his reasons. "You can't replicate the dynamic feel of a coil shock with air," he says. "Air is a changing entity. Trying to make air and coil feel as close together as possible is the holy grail of mountain bike suspension.

"People sway towards air shocks because they're so light [but] it's static weight. If you're going to concentrate on making a bike go fast, your rotational mass has to be as light as possible. A damper is static – it doesn't make you go slower because it's 150g heavier. You have to look at what it gives you in bump force management and what the job of a shock really is."



ABOVE: It's amazing what you can find in the boot of a Citroën Saxo...

BELOW: Dave's been heavily involved with every aspect of the shocks' design from the get-go




Dave is nothing if not enthusiastic about his projects


Dave swaps out Rob's shock for his EXT unit

easier. There's no bottom-out adjustment or lockout, just a damper unit designed to do exactly what it needs to do in the most efficient way possible.

So, if you're not going to make a shock with just about every dial and adjustment going, what's the priority? "The shock needs to be as bump efficient as possible," says Dave. "Very, very sensitive. That was the initial project – to see how low we could get the pressure (also called charge) rating, but still produce a very usable, adjustable damper." The low pressure used in the piggyback chamber helps minimise the force needed to get the shock moving.

The wind picks up and the snow starts falling once again. Luckily we're just about done snapping pictures. We head to the cafe to grab a drink, warm up and learn more about the guts of the EXT unit. With bellies full of cake and coffee, Dave dives enthusiastically into more detail.

"The pressure rating – 2bar or 29psi – is extremely low, like nothing else out there," he says. The EXT damper is a mono rather than twin-tube »

The EXT damper uses a **fraction of the pressure** normally required to enable a shock **to perform**

design and uses a fraction of the pressure normally required to enable a shock to perform effectively. It's common to see well over 200psi in other designs. Dave elaborates: "When you need to put in an amount of pressure like that [200psi plus], you're beginning to cover up an inadequacy inside the damper. Whether it's through design or costs, something means you have to run that pressure to make it work properly."

Honed to perfection

After two-and-a-half years in development, the EXT shocks have undergone multiple piston changes, tweaks to the compression range and the addition of a new coil spring – created by Franco and Dave – that is, in Dave's words, "more efficient and dynamic than titanium", while continuing to maintain the ridiculously high quality that Franco was insistent on throughout. They're now ready to roll out to the public.

So, how do the two EXT units compare with current high-end offerings? Is this a case of less is more? Well, initial impressions are certainly promising, with plenty of control and composure when it counts. Dave also plans on working with each and every customer to get things dialled in properly so they can get the most out of the damper. While he may not be driving a big rig suspension service centre, he knows what he's doing.

As the light fades, Dave sets off on his long drive back home to North Wales, in the same car (well, maybe not the exact one) that he has to thank for getting this shock project up and running in the first place.



Running the original shock back to back with the EXT unit helped highlight the differences



Preparing to set the sag on the Storia



"Two coffees, two cakes and a couple of bespoke coil springs please"

TESTING

Dave is a firm believer in balancing dyno testing with real-world testing. "Dyno testing is absolutely essential," he says. "It tells you what the thing does at a multitude of different shaft speeds, lets you monitor heat build-up, shows you the general balance of compression and rebound, and helps you make sure hysteresis [the damping lag that occurs when a shock switches between the compression and rebound phases] isn't too bad, as that's the enemy of suspension. But you also have to factor in the feeling a rider gets from suspension." Using top riders for in-the-field testing meant Dave and Franco could evaluate their dyno findings against how the shock performed on the trail.



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10 THINGS TO TRY IN 2015

2

FIX YOUR OWN BIKE



KEEP CALM AND WORK IT OUT

Fed up with having to fork out to get your bike serviced or fixed? Here's how to tune, fettle and spanner your own bike into mechanical perfection

CHILL OUT!

Instead of spending an hour tightening every bolt you can find and blindly spraying WD40 everywhere before breaking down into a sobbing mess, think like a mechanic. If there's a problem with a dropper post, for example, look at the big picture – the issue must either lie with the remote, the cable running to the remote, the mechanism that attaches the cable to the post or the post itself. By eliminating each possibility individually, you quickly establish the likely culprit. Thinking logically will save you a lot of time.

WATCH A VIDEO



Working on your bike has been made a lot less intimidating by the online tutorial. Many manufacturers now ensure that their products are backed up with tech videos. A quick Google of the product name and maintenance job you're attempting will usually bring up some video help. Also check out the huge library of bike fix tutorials we have on BikeRadar's YouTube Channel.

START SMALL



The key to learning bike mechanics is to start small and work your way up to the complicated stuff. Jobs like fitting a new seatpost or handlebar are brilliant for giving you an idea of how a bike is bolted together while also tearing down the walls of blind fear.

BASIC CHECKS

The road to spanner-waggling perfection begins with some simple pre-ride checks



Brakes
Do your brakes bring you to a halt in a safe and controlled manner or do you need to start hanging off the levers 50ft ahead?



Tyre pressure
How much air is in your tyres? If it's a lot less than yesterday, then you'd best work out where it's getting out.



Suspension seals
Do your fork and shock move through their travel with buttery smoothness or like a rough day at the sandpaper factory?



Chain
Does your chain resemble Mick Hucknall's hair or is it clean, lightly lubed and skipping through the gears like a gazelle through gravy?

TORQUE THE TORQUE

Perhaps the most valuable, and often overlooked, tool in any toolbox is the torque wrench. Before tightening up any bolt check the part itself (or look online) for the torque setting – ie how tight the bolt should be. Running the torque wrench over your bike every now and again or after any tune-up will not only improve your safety but also help to eliminate annoying creaks or rattles.



TOOLS YOU'LL NEED

Experienced mechanics treat their tools like chefs treat their knives, and can garner vast toolboxes full of them. Here are our essentials for the newbie…

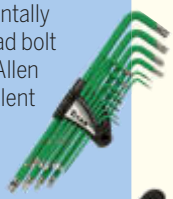
ALLEN KEYS

Mountain bikes typically use Allen head bolts between 2 and 10mm. For value go for a multi-headed tool. For longevity go for long-handled, workshop quality individual Allen keys.



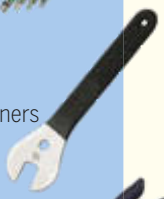
TORX KEYS

You're not a bike mechanic until you've accidentally stripped a Torx head bolt thinking it was an Allen head. Not as prevalent as the latter but they're becoming more common.



PEDAL SPANNER

Long-handled spanners equal easier pedal removal.



CABLE CUTTERS

Keep these super-sharp for tidy cable ends and easier threading.



RUBBER MALLET

Great for gently tapping out reluctant bearings or impressing Victorian ladies on strength testing machines.



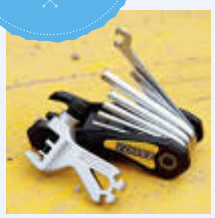
TAKE YOUR TIME



You've a new chainring to fit before Sunday's big ride with your mates. Do you fit it a) on Thursday evening or b) Sunday morning? More often than not, problems when working on your bike arise from rushing the job. If you get it wrong the first time, but have time to work out what went wrong, then the faff levels will drop dramatically. Remember – less haste, more speed.

TRAILSIDE FIXES

Pack smart and fix gremlins in front of a wowed crowd of onlookers like a boss!



MULTI-TOOL
A decent range of Allen keys, a couple of screwdriver heads and a T25 Torx head should be ample.



ZIPTIES
If you can't fix the problem with zipties then you're just not using enough zipties!



PUNCTURE SPARES
Always carry a spare tube, tyre levers and pump – even if you run tubeless.



MASTER/QUICK LINKS
Just make sure to pick the ones compatible with your chain...

ADVANCED MECHANICS

Affect the air of a master mechanic in these three simple steps...

1 Have Radio 2 on, at ALL times...
2 Tut at any and every mechanical issue brought up by a friend. Combine with a lateral shake of the head/vertical raise of the eyebrows for maximum effect.
3 Wear an apron.



NEXT ISSUE
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TREK



PODIUM QUEEN

The golden girl of downhill racing — and now enduro — Tracy Moseley is still at the top of her game

Words Chris Davison **Pics** Chris Davison, Matt Delorme

There are names in the world of mountain biking that instantly command respect: Tracy Moseley is one of them. With a career that spans almost two decades and countless downhill World Cup wins and titles to her name, she's still continuing to evolve as an athlete.

We caught up with Tracy at a damp Forest of Dean to look back – and forward – on her career. Tracy spent her early years growing up on the family farm in Worcestershire. "I remember always having a bike (an old BMX or road bike) as a means of getting around the farm," she says. "My brother Ed and I used to make loads of ramps and obstacles to ride – I guess we were making North Shore way before we knew what North Shore was!"

Things all changed when her dad bought Tracy a mountain bike. "It was the first bike that wasn't a hand-me-down from my brother, so it was actually the right size for me." After taking part in several races alongside Ed, Tracy began to realise where her strengths lay. "I raced the Malvern Hills Classic dual slalom, which at the time was one of the biggest bike festivals in the UK, and it was on my doorstep," she says.

"In 1994 I remember winning the race and the organiser took me aside and said, 'Do you realise you have just beaten the best girls we have racing DH in the UK?' I wasn't following the sport so didn't know who anyone was and wasn't really fussed about racing until that point, but the encouragement from my brother and the race organiser was enough for me to then decide to race a full UK national DH series in 1995."

Going for gold

Although Tracy displayed an incredible natural talent for racing, it wasn't just the thought of riding her bike that spurred her on. "If I'm honest, at first the appeal was the success – I just liked racing. I liked riding, but I didn't love it enough to want to ride in the week between races!" In 1995 her DH career got a major boost, thanks to Helen Mortimer giving Tracy her previous season's bike and kit. "That was a big step for me. I remember feeling like a pro! Helen was a huge help then and throughout my career."

In 1996 Tracy was signed to her first proper team. "I was lucky to get picked up by a team so quickly and the Volvo Cannondale Junior development team was such a great opportunity for me." However, it was not all plain sailing. In 1997 she narrowly missed out on winning the Junior World Champs, and this single event became the biggest driving force in her downhill career. "I was gutted, I really felt as though I was riding well enough to win this race and it was my last year as a junior. Seeing that rainbow jersey on someone else was the moment when I made it my goal to win one as a senior rider!"

Mixing it up

In between racing downhill Tracy also raced in several other disciplines, including 4X, slalom and dual slalom. In 2003 she teamed up with then Kona teammate Steve Peat for the Jeep Series dual slalom. "That was cool – a televised production in the US where they invited a few teams to compete." She says, "I think dual slalom could have been so much more than it ever was, as it was a great spectacle and loads of fun. I would love to see more of it now – you only need some grass banking and poles to go around!" In 2005 she took part in her first Megavalanche, and the event left a lasting impression on her. »





Tracy can turn her talent to all disciplines – the last couple of years she's raced enduro, XC and some DH







Tracy's gearing up for the 2015 Enduro World Series – can she make a third consecutive win?





"If I'm honest, at first the appeal was the success – I just liked racing"

RIDING HIGH

TOP 10 CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1. Winning the World Champs DH 2010
2. Winning the first ever Enduro World Series (EWS) in 2013
3. Winning EWS again in 2014
4. First World Cup win in Fort William in 2002
5. World Cup overall 2006
6. World Cup overall 2011
7. First World Cup podium, Grouse Mountain, Canada 2001
8. Bronze medal at 2013 National XC Champs
9. Racing in GB XC team relay in 2011 World Champs
10. First senior National DH title in 1998

MOSELEY'S MOVES

HOW TO RIDE A TECHNICAL ROOT OR STEP

These techniques need to be carried out in one fluid movement, so if you're struggling practise a pedal-assisted front wheel lift and a rear wheel lift separately on the flat, then build them together on the trail and then finally uphill with a tricky, slippery root.



1 Approach speed must be right – enough to clear the obstacle but also keep your pedalling speed controlled. Look ahead and keep your eyes and head up to help balance and line choice.



2 Just before the step, push down into your fork and bend your elbows. As your fork rebounds put in a strong pedal stroke. Shift your weight back to lighten your front wheel and lift it onto the step.



3 As soon as your front wheel touches keep eyes and head up, unweight the saddle by standing up and forward, and point your toes and scoop your pedals back to help lift the rear wheel.



4 As soon as your back wheel is up the step, bring your weight back to central and sit on the saddle and pedal away up the hill, still keeping your head up and eyes looking ahead on the trail.

"I retired from DH because I had reached my goal of winning the World Champs"



When Tracy first started riding enduro she had no idea she'd race at the top level

"A mass start race on a glacier – a pretty mad concept – with a super long DH," she recalls.

After a very successful career, in 2011 Tracy waved goodbye to the world of competitive downhill racing. "I retired from DH because I had reached my goal of winning the World Champs, after many years of trying, and I wanted to try a few other disciplines."

Enduro as a discipline was starting to develop and caught Tracy's attention, but she had no idea how big a part of her life it would become. "In 2012 I did loads of different enduro events in Europe, along with some XC and other stuff," she says. "I just wanted to broaden my experience in the sport and get a better appreciation for other disciplines. At that time I had not planned on still racing in 2015 at the highest level, but this time in a new discipline!"

As for enduro's surge in popularity, she says, "When you think about it, it makes sense because it's just a formalised competition for the trail riding that most people enjoy at a weekend: having a social ride to the top of a hill then racing your friends down to the bottom! Now it's been branded as 'enduro' it seems new and cool."

Tracy is starting this season after winning both years the Enduro World Series has been running, and 2015's series is shaping up to be the biggest yet. Tracy says, "I'd love to win another world title, but if I don't I can still be really satisfied with

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Tracy on her way to winning round three of the Enduro World Series in Valloire last season

"I love the opportunities and lifestyle that mountain biking has given me"

T-MO'S EVENTS

RACE DIARY

The 2015 season is going to be an exciting one for Tracy. "I'm looking forward to the first Enduro World Series race in New Zealand the most," she says. "I love New Zealand and I'm so excited to visit the country again. I'm also looking forward to the Scottish round of the Enduro World Series as it feels like Fort William used to feel like in my downhill racing days," she enthuses. "And the Transprovence – it's the first time I've done it in four years so it'll be fun to ride a six-day race again."

the career I have had. I plan to continue to enjoy my riding and my racing as much as I can and put up a good fight for the win."

Girls on top

As well as her racing and work with T-MO Coaching, Tracy puts a lot of time and effort into promoting women's biking. "I enjoy trying to encourage more women into the sport as I love the opportunities and lifestyle mountain biking has given me. If I can help a few other girls get that chance, that's great."

So what are Tracy's plans? "I'm definitely coming to the end of my racing career," she says. "I'd like to have more time to invest in young riders." Last year Tracy organised a 'Riding with champions' day at the Forest of Dean along with fellow world champs Manon Carpenter (DH) and Katy Curd (4X), for girls aged 12-18. "I don't know how often the UK will produce three world champs in three different disciplines in the same year! That's pretty special. I felt if that can't be an inspiration for girls to have a go, then I don't know what else we can do."

Tracy enjoys her coaching and development work and wants to do more of it. She says, "I'd also like to do some more adventure riding." But which young rider will she pass her crown on to?



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For videos, galleries and more info on the guys' snowbound adventure, head over to **MBUK.com**

SUB ZERO HEROES

Matt and Tom are back from riding across the frozen wastes of Finland, and they've still got all their fingers and toes!

Words Matt Orton **Pics** Antti Kurola and *MBUK*

As my front wheel sinks hub deep into soft powder I instinctively put a foot down to stay upright. My leg plunges into the snow, pitching me sideways and depositing 23kg (50lb) of bike and gear on top of me. After months looking forward to this race, the adage "be careful what you wish for" is running through my head. I've covered an unknown distance from the start line and have no idea how far the next checkpoint is. The sub-zero temperatures have drained the batteries in my aging GPS unit and I don't have the right adaptor for my portable charger.

Luckily, a line of reflective markers leads me through the white landscape like a trail of breadcrumbs. I have 42 hours to complete the 150km course and avoid disqualification. All I need to do is keep pedalling, and if it gets unridable, then keep pushing. I'd like to find a checkpoint soon though. It's cold, getting dark and my hydration pack is feeling worryingly light. This is my first mountain bike race. »



TOM'S SARMA SHAMAN

If I was going to take part in a 150km race I wasn't going to do it on anything other than a carbon race bike, and that's just what the Shaman is, only one designed around fat tyres. With a rather fancy build, my Sarma wasn't far off the weight of a conventional XC bike. The humongous down tube and BB area and bolt-through back end meant as much power as possible was transmitted to the monster truck tyres, and although the fork only had a QR axle, I never hit anything technical enough to warrant a stiffer front end. Carbon rims minimised wheel weight – vital for a sprightly feeling bike – although at over a kilo a piece, plus tubes, they weren't exactly super-light. If you want to cover ground quickly on a fatbike, we'd not look much further.

£1,650 (frameset)
www.ison-distribution.com

RACE DAY SPEC
FRAME Carbon fibre **FORK** Sarma Hoboy (rigid, carbon fibre) **TRANSMISSION** SRAM XX1 with Grip Shift shifters (1x11) **BRAKES** Avid Guide hydraulic discs **WHEELS** Salsa hubs laced to Sarma Naran 80mm carbon rims with DT Swiss Comp spokes **TYRES** Surly Nate 26x4in **FINISHING KIT** Renthal Fatbar Lite Carbon bar, Renthal Apex stem, Genetic Syngetic seatpost, Charge Scoop saddle, Nukeproof Electron Evo pedals **WEIGHT** 11kg/24lb (unloaded)

Rewind 12 hours and I'm stood on a frozen river at the start of the Rovaniemi 150 Arctic Winter Race with Tom from sister mag *What Mountain Bike* and 27 other riders from as far afield as the US and Australia, not to mention a surprising number of fellow Brits –around a third of the field. Speaking to the other riders, it's clear Tom and I aren't the only ones who are well out of our comfort zones.

Fraternity of fatbikers

Conversations are initiated with a squeeze of super-wide front tyre and an opening gambit about air pressures. My assertion that "6psi is great on the river but I'll need to drop it to around 5psi for the trails" is met with nods of approval, so I presume I'm on the right track. The safety briefing has done nothing to allay my concerns about the difficulty of this race though. The race director, Alex Casanovas, has covered every possible eventuality and hazard, including a particularly treacherous footbridge that left a previous competitor requiring emergency help. The €100 evacuation deposit suddenly seems like a sound investment.

I'm surrounded by a sea of fatbikes – steel, aluminium, carbon and titanium frames fitted with multi-coloured frame bags, racks, straps, pogies and cages that give them the look of a mechanical mule or packhorse. One bike that's receiving a lot of attention is an original Wildfire from the late 90s. That's right – fatbikes just went retro! While the bikes are clearly distinguishable, the same isn't true of their riders. There's a common look – weathered and windswept mountain man, generally a little over 30 and with a suitably rugged beard.

The race start comes without any great ceremony – it is, after all, below freezing. As the air horn sounds, a hardy group of friends, family and locals cheer and shout. We're off!

The speed with which the leading pack disappears into the distance is staggering – it's almost as if no one has told them this is an Arctic race and they're riding fatbikes. Surely it won't be sustainable? Before long it feels like I'm trailing in last place. I push the negative thoughts to the back of my mind – all I have to think about is following the markers.

Snow angels

It doesn't take long before I encounter the first stretch of what will become a frustratingly common trail surface – soft snow. It's unseasonably warm in this part of Finland this year. On our second night it rained, which we're assured hasn't happened in February in living memory. With daytime temperatures hovering around -4°C, the snow isn't quite slushy – which is fortunate because that would mean a greater risk of getting wet – but it isn't as compacted as we'd like.

I see my first fatbike angel – the perfect impression of a rider and bike in the snow at

THE LOWDOWN

The Rovaniemi 150, now in its fourth year, is a 150km (93 mile) fatbike race through Northern Finland's subarctic landscape. Of the 29 riders in this year's event, only two failed to finish. The win was decided by a sprint finish, with the top four riders all posting times within a minute of 10 hours 40 minutes – a new course record.
www.rovaniemi150.com

As the air horn sounds, a hardy group of friends, family and locals cheer and shout. We're off!



MATT'S SURLY ICT OPS

By Surly's own admission the Ice Cream Truck is a "trail approved ripper", not an adventure bike or race machine. Designed around RockShox's Bluto suspension fork and boasting some of the slackest angles you'll find on a fatbike, it didn't sound like the perfect choice of bike for this race. Which is why I was really impressed with its performance. Could it be lighter? Hell, yeah! Were the 3.8in tyres wide enough? Nope, there were times when I could have done with extra flotation on the unseasonably soft snow. This is a bike that's unlikely to trouble the podium but I've proven it can still complete an event like this in a respectable time. There's no doubting its versatility, and with a few minor tweaks I'll be ripping around the trails back home all year round.

£2,199.99 (complete bike)
www.ison-distribution.com

RACE DAY SPEC
FRAME 4130 chromoly steel **FORK** Surly Ice Cream Truck (rigid, 4130 chromoly) **TRANSMISSION** SRAM X0 with Grip Shift shifters and Surly OD cranks (2x10) **BRAKES** Avid BB7 cable discs **WHEELS** Salsa hubs laced to Surly Rolling Darryl rims with DT Swiss Comp spokes **TYRES** Surly Nate 26x3.8in **FINISHING KIT** Answer ProTAPER Carbon 720 Enduro 20/20 bar, Kalloy AS-025N stem, Kalloy SP-342 seatpost, Charge Scoop saddle, Nukeproof Electron Evo pedals **WEIGHT** 16kg/35lb (unloaded)



The start line was a bit different from your usual mountain bike race





EAT

We knew we weren't going to manage 150km on a hotel breakfast alone, so nutrition during the race was crucial. With limited room we needed to pack as many calories into as little space as possible, so we stashed SiS GO Energy gels and GO Electrolyte drink sachets in and around our kit. While we munched on 'normal' food a lot of the time, gels are a quick and easy way to consume calories, and they don't taste as bad as they used to. SiS's range includes regular gels along with caffeinated versions for an extra kick when you're low, as well as pre-race nitrate loaded gels designed to improve blood flow and therefore oxygen delivery to the muscles.



the edge of the trail – and it makes me laugh out loud. It isn't long before I'm making my own versions though, with a little more flailing and rolling.

Riders in the front pack have dismounted to push their bikes through the soft snow, resulting in knee-deep holes and badly churned up sections that make the trail unridable for those of us following. Picking a safe line through the carnage is made all the more difficult by the handlebar roll that obscures my front wheel and makes every steering adjustment a matter of luck more than judgment.

I speed through the first two checkpoints, only stopping to sign in and out. I've hardly touched my water and want to get as many miles as possible under my belt while my legs are still fresh. Immediately after the second checkpoint the trail diverts into woodland. This is the first of two sections that are inaccessible to snowmobiles and have been groomed for the race with snowshoes instead.

Push comes to shove

Unfortunately, by the time I arrive it looks like a stampede has been through. There's no way I'll be staying on the bike for this. The trees are tight and branches hidden below the snow snag my pedals and cranks. The only option is to take a firm hold of any available part of frame or fork and wrench my bike and gear through the snow using sheer brute force.

Eventually the trees thin out and I find myself on the edge of a lake, with a flat and ridable trail stretching as far as the eye can see. I soon find my rhythm and feel like I'm making progress. The whiteness of the landscape makes judging distance difficult though, and with no landmarks and only a pixelated map printout to navigate by I'm keen to reach the next checkpoint so I can put a definite mark on the route and top up my water. It isn't long »



A third of the field were fellow Brits, like Paul Hollis on the right here



One of the seven race checkpoints









The snowshoe groomed sections were tough, filled with deep snow you could only push through



It seems beards and fatbikes make happy bedfellows (but no bearded ladies in our race)

until I catch the telltale whiff of woodsmoke from the fire pit – an early warning system that I use for the rest of the race, almost trying to sniff out the next checkpoint.

Sign in. Fill up with water. Sign out. I'm feeling pretty good and forge ahead into the familiar white landscape.

Dutch courage

I've been leapfrogging another rider for the majority of the race. Constantijn, from Holland, has a lightweight carbon fibre frame and wheels and is running 5in tyres that are proving very efficient in the soft snow. When it comes to the pushing sections though, my North Face Chilkat 2 snow boots give me an edge and I quickly overtake him. Sharing boiling water to heat our boil-in-the-bag rations at the fifth checkpoint, we decide to set off together for the next stretch. It'll be dark soon and companionship will be welcome.

After another section through un-snowmobiled forest we break out on to a road and pick up the pace for a few miles as darkness falls. Falling back into a pattern of to and fro, we catch up with a German rider called Sacha and the three of us ride on towards the last checkpoint before the longest 35km stage. With just a mile or so to go, Sacha's hub gear fails and, despite his best efforts and my expert torch holding, he decides to push.

The checkpoint is pure luxury – a round hunter's cabin with a roaring fire in the middle – and I'm happy to settle down for some soup and sausages. Leaving the warmth isn't easy, but with the longest stage ahead of us it's soon time to saddle up. Frustratingly, we're immediately faced with the longest push of the race so far. With darkness confusing our senses, the distance feels immense. I don't think I've ever been so happy to see tarmac as I am when we eventually emerge at a small hamlet. After a quick stop to add a few psi to our tyres to help with the upcoming ice road riding, the next 20km is a blur of sleepy villages and town streets. My Surly Nate tyres work exceedingly well on the lightly gritted sheet ice that covers the Finnish roads to a depth of several inches.

With one final push and pedal through dense woodland we come upon the penultimate checkpoint and the prone forms of sleeping racers. It's late now, probably 4.30am, and the urge to join the slumbering riders is strong, but after a brief stop for hot soup and as much dry food as I can manage, I make myself get back on the bike. I'm now determined that I'll finish this race – and more than that, I'll do it within 24 hours.

I've never felt exhaustion like this before. I try to force an energy gel down for a caffeine boost but my stomach turns and I find myself retching over the side of the bike. That's that then – no supplements for the rest of the race. After hitting the final lake, Constantijn and I part company. He has his sights on a faster time than I'll manage. I wish his distant blinking rear light luck and consign myself to a solo final 25km.

Tripping

Absolute darkness and utter exhaustion makes for a heady combination. I've been tired before but never to the point of hallucination, but here, in the remote subarctic wilderness, my sleep-deprived mind starts playing some pretty weird tricks on me in the periphery of my head torch beam. Exotic animals that have no place anywhere near the Arctic Circle pop in and out of sight, my imagination triggered by the sounds of large animals, probably moose, moving behind the curtain of pine branches.

Sleep becomes a serious consideration. My winter »

I've been tired before but never to the point of hallucination. Exotic animals pop in and out of sight





COLD WEATHER KIT

To survive the extremes of Arctic riding we went to the experts at Go Outdoors for advice on the best kit to keep the elements at bay

1 North Ridge Onyx men's gilet
Small and packable synthetic bodywarmer, an ideal part of a layering system to help keep your core warm
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2 Marmot Thermo half zip baselayer
Close fitting baselayer made from waffle pattern fabric for superior insulation and wicking ability while remaining breathable
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3 Rab Baseline hoody
Fast-wicking baselayer made from both Polartec and PowerDry material to make sure you stay warm and dry
£75 (£50)

4 Montane Sabretooth softshell jacket
Highly breathable windproof jacket that's a perfect pairing with the Terra trousers
£175 (£118)

5 Montane Terra Thermostretch mountain pants
Stretchy and well vented softshell trousers with a water repellent treatment
£110 (£64.97)

6 Scarpa Manta mountain boots
Alpine boots with sufficient insulation and a stiff sole ideal for pedalling
£249.99 (£149.97)

7 Rab Latok Alpine gaiters
Perfect for keeping snow out of your boots when pushing through unridable sections
£40 (£36)

8 Rab Andes 1000 sleeping bag
Rated to -26°C, this mandatory kit item is designed for fast and light adventures
£460

9 Lifeventure Dri-Store bags
Ultra lightweight dry bags for keeping spare clothes and equipment dry
From £8.99 (£8.09)

10 Hi Gear First Aid Kit 3
Safety is paramount on any kind of adventure. Being able to patch yourself up is essential
£17 (£11.99)

11 North Ridge Valiant 100l holdall
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£89.99 (£69.99)

12 Lifesystems survival bag
If things go bad, keeping warm and dry will save your life. An essential item you hope you'll never need
£4.50 (£3.99)

13 Hi Gear Ultralite lightweight sleeping mat
Sleeping mats aren't just for comfort. The extra space between you and the ground helps to insulate you from the cold too
£40 (£22.47)

NB: Blue prices are with Go Outdoors discount card (£5 for a year)

ADVENTURE ESSENTIALS

There's no such thing as packing light for an Arctic winter race. Self-sufficiency and safety are important factors when selecting your kit. Here are the things that got us through...



1 **POC** Fornix Backcountry MIPS helmet £174.99 www.2pure.co.uk
2 **Alpkit** Stem Cell bag £18 www.alpkit.com
3 **ANSWER** ProTAPER Carbon 720 Enduro 20/20 bar £119.99 www.hotlines-uk.com
4 **CamelBak** Classic 2l hydration pack £44.99 www.zyro.co.uk
5 **CamelBak** Antidote thermal control kit £22.99 www.zyro.co.uk
6 **Topeak** rescue box £4.50 www.extrauk.co.uk
7 **Salsa** Anything cage £17.99 www.charliethebikemonger.com
Porcelain Rocket frame bags:
8 Booster Rocket seat pack $165
9 Salsa Anything cage bags $100
10 Single compartment frame pack $180
11 MCA handlebar system $125
All www.porcelainrocket.com
12 **Petzl** Ultra Rush Belt head torch £305 www.cyclestore.co.uk
13 **Brunton** All Day GoPro HERO 3+ power supply £40 www.brunton.com
14 **GoPro** HERO 3 White action camera £169.99 www.madison.co.uk
15 **Gerber** Outdoor knife £39.99 www.gerbergear.co.uk
16 **Light My Fire** Swedish FireSteel 2.0 £15.50 www.lightmyfire.com
17 **Greenman Bushcraft** Natural Organic Down Tinder £2.75 www.greenmanbushcraft.co.uk
18 **Silva** Expedition compass £25 silva.se
19 **Surly** fatbike tube £11.99 www.ison-distribution.com
20 **Topeak** Mountain Morph pump £28.99 www.extrauk.co.uk
21 **POC** Retina Big goggles £145 www.2pure.co.uk
22 **Revelate Designs** Williwaw Pogies £POA (approx £95) www.backcountrybiking.co.uk
23 **Gerber** Suspension multi-plier £50 www.gerbergear.co.uk
24 **Topeak** Hexus II multi-tool £19.99 www.extrauk.co.uk
25 **The North Face** Chilkat II boots £100 www.thenorthface.co.uk
26 **Nukeproof** Electron Evo pedals £34.99 www.hotlines-uk.com
27 **MSR** Pocket Rocket stove £30 www.cascadedesigns.com
28 **JetBoil** Jetpower fuel canister (100g) £4 www.jetboil.com
29 **MSR** Titan kettle £50 www.cascadedesigns.com

sleeping bag would cope with the conditions fine and I could get going again with a clear head and fresh legs. But I'm now chasing the 24-hour mark so I crank my twist shifter up a gear and pedal on.

As I emerge on to the river my head seems to clear. A pick-me-up is needed and I find this in the form of a Kendal mint cake I've been saving for just such a time. The rush of sugar helps and the flat river becomes a welcome final leg. I fly through the last checkpoint, feeling drunk and probably not making any sense to the marshals.

Ploughing into a faint headwind, I have just over an hour to complete the final 12km, the sun is coming up and I've had half a Kendal mint cake – game on! But my newfound enthusiasm doesn't last long.

The home stretch turns into a battle of mind over matter as the minutes tick away and I don't feel like the end is any closer. The landscape is flat and the only landmark – a bridge on the horizon – isn't getting any nearer. I've resigned myself to the fact I'm not going to finish within 24 hours. I'll finish the race, but it'll feel like I've missed my main goal. I'll make sure I get close, though. Pedal!

Will he make it?

As I pass under the bridge and cross the start line from the previous day – although it feels like it was a week ago – I take one last look at my watch. I have four minutes left. Shit, I can do this! I don't know where the energy comes from but I'm out of the saddle and haulin' ass like never before. Without waiting for lights to change or traffic to stop I blast across the road, throw down my fatbike in front of some startled smokers and sprint into the foyer of the Pohjanhovi Hotel, to cheers from several guests who point me in the direction of the race operations room and the official finish line.

I burst through the door shouting for the time like a crazy man, punch drunk and delirious. When the answer comes – 23 hours, 59 minutes – I collapse into the nearest chair. Bloody hell that was close, and one hell of a way to pop my racing cherry!

HOW WE BEAT THE COLD

#1 Plastic pedals

Metal pedals conduct the cold straight into the soles of your feet. We swapped ours for plastic ones to slow the chill.

#2 Wrap it up

We wrapped any metal contact points on our bars to stop the cold travelling through our pogies (hand covers). Hockey tape was ideal.

#3 Give it the boot

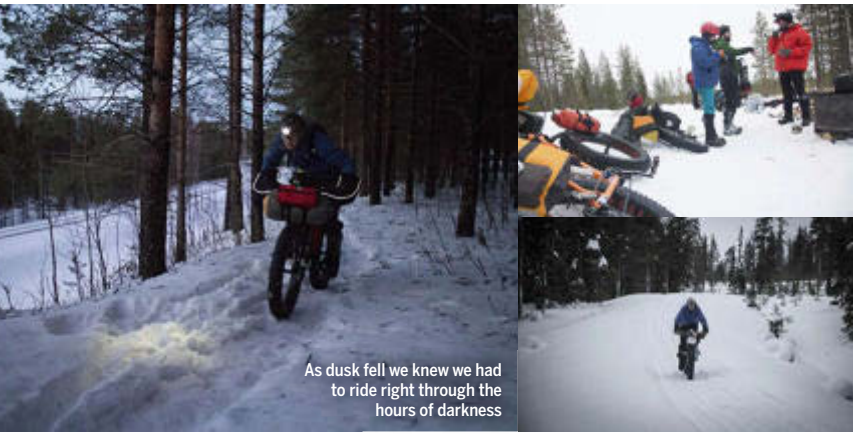
Doing boots up too tight restricts your circulation and makes your feet colder so we left plenty of wiggle room. Walking got the blood flowing to our feet so it made sense to push for short periods.

#4 Power through the cold

Batteries hate the cold. Lithium-ion batteries proved the best bet. We stashed spare batteries and back-up power packs around our bodies to keep them warm.

#5 Cool snacks

We tested how our food changed with the cold by sticking it in the fridge. Some cereal bars and snacks become difficult to eat when the temperature drops.



As dusk fell we knew we had to ride right through the hours of darkness



The end of the race was a sprint finish, right to the official finish line inside the hotel



pro:rider steve peat

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Olly Forster

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James Blackwell

Short and fast, pinned or binned, Art Editor Jimmer has been testing kit longer than he'll happily admit to



James Costley-White

JCW casts the same critical eye over the latest kit as he does the articles submitted to the mag



Jake Ireland

Jake spends every day riding, and his injury list proves he's pushing the limits to provide the very best testing



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SPECIALIZED AREN'T ONES to do things by halves, so when they launched their 2FO Clip shoes they also served up some new flat pedal footwear, the 2FO Flats. At £90 they're a good price but are still packed with some great features.

The air-mesh upper and tongue do a good job of preventing heat build-up, though they do mean your feet can get chilly and wet on winter rides. The injection-moulded toe bumper is sturdy enough to ward off knocks and bumps when dragging your foot around a turn, which is handy when the trail gets loose. We're also a big fan of the elasticated Lacelock system, which stops the laces flapping about.

In terms of pedal connection though, the 2FO Flats don't quite match the performance of the market-leading Five Ten Impact VXis. The SlipNot rubber and 'sharkskin' forefoot tread pattern provide impressive grip, but the stiffness and depth of the sole takes some time to get used to and means feedback from the pedals is just a little vaguer than we'd like. That stiffness means there's some heel slip when walking too. When it comes to comfort, the 2FO Flats are hard not to like though. **ROB**

MBUK

Comfy and well priced with decent grip, but stiff sole means they lack some of that all-important pedal feel

O'Neal Appalachee knee pads

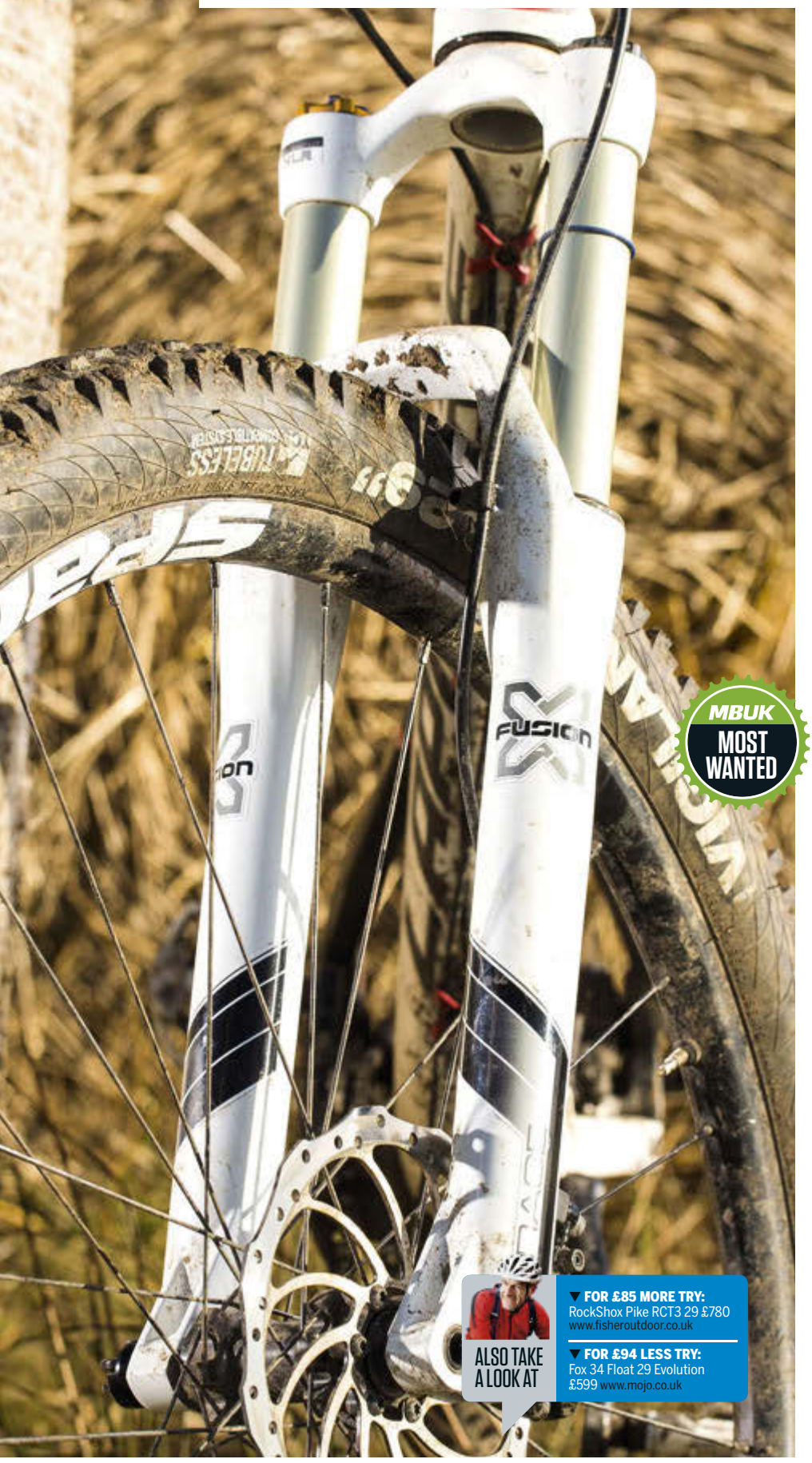
£33.99 O'Neal www.oneal.eu

THESE PEDALLING-FRIENDLY offerings have no side padding, with coverage being limited to the knee cap and surrounding area. A stretchy mesh sleeve keeps the pad in place, with a wide cutout at the back to help keep things cool. There's a soft lining for comfort and the SC-1 knee cup is nice and malleable. With no straps to hold them up, the Appalachees don't feel all that secure but they do stay in place with no need for readjustment as you ride. The cutout means they bunch and splay a little as you flex your knees. On long rides we found the bottom of the pad dug into the top of our shins a little too. **JAMER**

MBUK



X-Fusion Trace Roughcut HLR



MBUK MOST WANTED

£694.99 Upgrade Bikes www.upgradebikes.co.uk

X-FUSION FORKS HAVE been offering impressively consistent control and rock solid reliability at a great price for several years now, with options for everything from lightweight cross-country riding to full-on downhill hammering. The new 140mm (5.5in) travel Trace Roughcut matches their proven 29er trail chassis to top-end damping and the results are outstanding.

While the new 'Roughcut' damper sounds like a dumbed down version of the HLR cartridge used in the X-Fusion Metric and RV-1 it's actually an evolution that offers improved performance and more user-friendly adjustment. For a start, the new damper piston means less stiction than with HLR and way less than with the RL2 damper of the standard Trace, so you get proper trail-hoovering traction and "ooh, plush" small-bump sensitivity from fresh.

Things are noticeably improved at the ragged edge of extended rocky/rooty/steppy sections too, where – like all but the best, most expensive forks – the rebound of the Trace used to become inconsistent. That's because Roughcut is a fully sealed bladder damper (like RockShox's Charger and Fox's FIT dampers) so there's no danger of air getting into the damping oil and causing cavitation, where the damping piston hiccups as it pushes through bubbles rather than consistent-resistance hydraulic oil. We've taken this system (the HLR version) to the maximum load, stump smashing, suicide straight line limit on the RV-1 and Metric for over a year and so far the new Trace has delivered similarly super-rich and supple control.

Where the original Trace really shone (and it still does for £595) was with its really well measured mid-stroke compression and the new fork doesn't disappoint in this area either. While the new fork still feels too soft off the top, you'll still rarely see the travel ring push past 60 per cent under braking or steering and the fork slingshots berms or stutter-bump corners with superb poise and tyre-flattering support. Both high- and low-speed compression damping are independently and widely adjustable via easy-to-adjust leg top knobs too, while 36 clicks of fine-tuned rebound adjustment is available at the bottom of the leg.

The single-piece crown and steerer design makes it feel much more secure than other 34mm legged 29er forks and not far off the benchmark Fox 36. At under 1,900g with a cut steerer it's a reasonable weight, and while it doesn't stretch to 160 or 150mm (6.3 or 5.9in) like the 29er versions of the 36 and Pike, travel can be internally adjusted from 140 down to 80mm (5.5in to 3.14in). **GUY**

ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▼ **FOR £85 MORE TRY:**
RockShox Pike RCT3 29 £780
www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

▼ **FOR £94 LESS TRY:**
Fox 34 Float 29 Evolution
£599 www.mojo.co.uk

MBUK

The new Roughcut damper helps the Trace deliver excellent supple yet supportive and fully adjustable 29er control at a great price

MBUK

WRECKED & RATED

Brand New Kit

PRODUCT NEWS

Trickle-down tech

If you're keen to try a 1x11 transmission but are put off by the steep pricing, fear not. SRAM have announced a new groupset called GX that'll be available in 1x11, 2x11 and 2x10 configurations. And with prices starting from £451, it'll cost nearly £300 less than their current cheapest 1x11 offering, X1. The cassette is a fully pinned number to cut costs but still features their impressive 10-42t range, and there's a choice of two cranksets. Check out www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk for a full breakdown of component costs.



Plus-size model

Heard about the new 27.5+ wheel size? It uses a wide 650b rim fitted with a 3in tyre to create a wheel with an outside diameter of 29in. So – on paper – you get the rollover benefits of a 29er combined with the lighter, stronger wheels of a 650b bike and semi-fatbike-like cushioning and grip. Don't think this new size will gain traction? You may need to think again – Fox Racing Shox have announced they'll be offering a 27.5+ version of their Float 34 fork, complete with 10mm wider axle spacing (so hub flanges can be built wider apart to create stiffer wheels) and fourth generation FIT damper. Keep 'em glued to www.mojo.co.uk.



Where's Knolly?

If you've spotted the bikes ridden by James Doerfling and Garett Buehler, you may be wondering where you can get one. Well, the brand in question is Knolly, and their bikes are now available here in the UK once again thanks to the guys at Decade Europe. Key models include the Podium downhill bike and the Endorphin 275, which uses Knolly's Fourby4 suspension system and has 130mm (5.1in) of rear wheel travel. For all the latest info, head to www.decade-europe.com. »



Gamut Trail SXC chain guide

£39.99 **Madison** www.madison.co.uk

DESPITE THE EFFECTIVENESS of narrow/wide rings and clutch mechs, chain derailments are still possible, so many enduro racers and aggressive riders use a lightweight top guide to keep their chain on track. At just £39.99 and 55g (ISCG-05), this beauty from Gamut promises the required security for relatively small penalties.

Set-up on our Focus SAM test rig was fairly straightforward, with the slider allowing enough horizontal room to access the full gear range but a little back-and-forth being required to prevent the chain fouling at extremes of the 160mm of travel (this is more likely to be a problem with more rear travel).

On the trail, the polyurethane slider with its rubberised sleeves deadens any chainslap noise and quietly gets on with its job. We've had no dropped chains or fouling issues on rough and rocky rides, even at the extremes of the cassette. Adjustable to fit 30 to 40t chainrings, the SXC is definitely worth considering if you want a bit of extra security and don't need a bashguard. **SEB**

MBUK ★★★★☆



Scott WIT helmet

£74.99 **Scott Sports**
www.scott-sports.com

AT JUST 270G, the WIT is well suited to cross-country whippets and those who like to spend hours in the saddle. The deep internal channelling and 23 vents mean overheating is never an issue, with masses of airflow even at slow speeds. Though the padding is thin, it's extremely comfortable and wicks sweat well. The minimalist retention cradle has upper and lower positions to choose from and an easy to use, indexed adjuster dial to get the fit just right. The MIT's peak is fixed in place but it's set at a decent height and doesn't get in your field of vision when you're tanking along the trail. On top of all that the price is good, as is the styling. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★☆

Dainese Rock Solid-C gloves

£24.99 **Windwave** www.windwave.co.uk

THE ROCK SOLID-CS have a hand-hugging fit and a thin palm, allowing for plenty of feel and feedback from the handlebar. We experienced a tiny bit of bunching in the palm but it didn't affect overall comfort. The stretchy, breathable backing means things don't get overly warm when the sun is shining – with the exception of the Airprene cuff, which is pretty chunky – yet the fabric is thick enough to keep a chill off of your hands and ward off bramble snags. The silicone print on the index and middle fingers and part of the palm is showing no real signs of wear even after a good couple of months of use. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★½☆





Bliss Vertical LD armour jacket

£154.99 **Madison** www.madison.co.uk

THE SLIM-FITTING Vertical LD body armour from Bliss is far less bulky than a traditional armour jacket but still offers a decent level of protection. Thanks to the stretchy Lycra base and cleverly articulated Armourgel padding, you soon forget you're wearing it.

Movement remains unrestricted around the elbows and shoulders, and it's only when things start to warm up that you start to notice the back protector, because it's the first thing to get sweaty. The close fit of the armour means you can slip a regular jersey over the top without looking like you're about to play a game of American football.

In terms of coverage, the wide spine guard protects the essentials without sitting so low that it'll interfere with the top of your shorts and the well-shaped shoulder and elbow pads extend nicely over the joints. The Vertical LD isn't cheap, but the comfort and protection on offer go a long way towards justifying the price tag. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★☆

Gore Alp-X Windstopper Soft Shell shorts

£109.99 **Gore Bike Wear**
www.goreapparel.co.uk

THE PRICE MAY make your eyes water, but these shorts are a class act when the conditions deteriorate. They have the tailored cut typical of Gore kit, allowing them to hug your hips' contours for a flap-free fit. Movement remains unrestricted on and off the bike, and they'll slip over knee pads without issue. Waist adjustment comes courtesy of sliding strap adjusters that are easy to use and unobtrusive. The two zipped, rear facing hip pockets are easily big enough for a phone or car keys, and there's next to no flapping around of the contents when pedalling.

It's the Alp-X's performance in bad weather that really stands out though. On cold, wet and windy days, the Windstopper material seals out the elements, keeping the chill off your thighs and your backside pretty much dry. As they're not fully waterproof they don't get clammy or sweaty either, which is great when you're putting in a long stint in the saddle. The only real downside is that despite the high price they don't come with a padded liner. **ROB**

MBUK

They're not cheap, but the Alp-X Windstoppers have proven their worth in grotty riding conditions

★★★★½



MBUK MOST WANTED

ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £25 LESS TRY:**
Fox Attack Q4 CW £85
www.foxhead.com

▼ **FOR £55 LESS TRY:**
Madison Tempest £54.99
www.madison.co.uk

MBUK

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Brand New Kit

PRODUCT NEWS Continued



Spring loaded

If you hanker for more of a coil-like feel from your Fox Float shock, Canada's Vorsprung Suspension may be able to help. They're offering an aftermarket air sleeve – the Corset – that promises to deliver a plusher, more sensitive feel but with plenty of mid-stroke support and a bottomless feel. Sounds good, eh? It'll set you back $165, including an air shaft seal kit and UK shipping. Info at www.vorsprungsuspension.com.



In range

The guys at Praxis Works have been in touch about their new 10-speed wide-range cassette. It'll have more even gaps between gears than a standard cassette fitted with an expander sprocket, which should mean smoother shifting. Price wise, Praxis intend to position it in Shimano XT cassette territory – pretty reasonable compared to the combined price of a standard cassette and extender cog – and you won't need a new freehub body to fit it. Keep an eye on www.upgradebikes.co.uk for pricing.



The new BLACK

AbsoluteBLACK has a new sister company, set up to design products exclusively for Chain Reaction Cycles. BLACKseries components will use the same raw materials, manufacturing techniques and teeth profiling as their absoluteBLACK counterparts but will be more basic in design and offered in limited sizes and colours to cut costs. With narrow/wide chainrings available from £28, it's certainly worth checking out the range at www.blackseries.cc.



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▼ **FOR £50 MORE TRY:**
Burgtec RideWide Carbon Trail £124.99 www.burgtec.co.uk

▼ **FOR £30 LESS TRY:**
Gusset Slade £44.99 www.ison-distribution.com

MBUK MOST WANTED

Spank Oozy 760 LTD Vibrocore handlebar

£74.99 **Hotlines** www.hotlines-uk.com

THE NEW 'VIBROCORE' version of Spank's £55 Oozy bar is a genuine weight and fatigue saver. While most 760mm wide alloy bars weigh 300g plus, the Oozy Vibrocore isn't far off carbon fibre weight at 242g. That's because Spank's super-accurate and very subtle XGT (Extreme Gradual Taper) Dual construction progressively thins the bar walls from the centre and out through the control zone until they thicken up again at the tips. The bar is also CNC bent in a single process for accurate symmetry rather than curved over several different shaping tools. In other words, what metal they've used is exactly where it needs to be.

The result is a very light alloy trail bar with a low rise (5 or 15mm) and only six degrees of backsweep for an aggressive weight-forward feel on the bike. The refined tube shaping adds a definite damped feel under your grips too, leaving forearms feeling fresh at the bottom of normally punishing descents and noticeably reducing fatigue over several hours as though you're running a few psi less in your tyres. There's still a ton of clearly communicated feedback though, and there's no obviously frightening flex even when you properly G-out the bike. Don't go too mental though because Spank categorise it as a trail and light enduro bar, not a totally bombproof bar for big hit or downhill use. **GUY**

MBUK

Expensive but very light and comfortable alloy trail bar that still steers with accuracy and authority



fi'zi:k Kurve Chameleon saddle

£189.99 (aluminium rails) **Extra UK** www.extrauk.co.uk

THE KURVE SITS right at the top of fi'zi:k's range and is available in three shapes for riders with different amounts of flexibility. Which to choose depends on your ability to touch (or not) your toes – we opted for the 'Chameleon' profile.

The saddle uses a unique 'Mobius' alloy rail system and a 'Re.Flex' carbon shell designed to twist and adapt with your inputs. You can also switch between two comfort 'tunes' by swapping out a piece under the nose. We stuck with the softer option so as not to cancel out the flexing action.

If you're an XC rider who enjoys crushing rivals on climbs, then this is your saddle! At 231g it's no skimpy lightweight and it feels firm at first, but the long, flat shape makes snap weight movements a cinch, and the subtle way the Kurve moves with you dramatically increases comfort on lengthy stints in the saddle. It's only the price that'll limit its appeal. **RIC**

MBUK



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▼ **FOR £100 MORE TRY:**
Middleburn RS8 X-Type £309
www.middleburn.co.uk

▼ **FOR £110 LESS TRY:**
Shimano Zee £99.99
www.madison.co.uk

Race Face Turbine Cinch crankset

£209 (with direct-mount chainring) + £39.95 for BB **Silverfish** www.silverfish-uk.com

WITH SHIMANO YET to offer their benchmark XC/trail cranks in a single-ring version below XTR level, Race Face are hoping to muscle in on their territory with the new Turbines, which sport a splined 'Cinch' interface that lets you run a direct-mount narrow/wide ring (or a removable spider with up to three chainrings if you prefer).

An oversize 30mm axle adds stiffness but the cranks are still compatible with standard threaded BB shells (68/73, 83 and 100mm) as well as the press-fit BB92 and PF30 standards. If you opt for the threaded BB, you'll need a BSA BB cup tool – Race Face's is £22.95. Fitting involves torqueing up a single bolt on the drive side (*a la* SRAM) and hand-tightening an adjuster on the non-drive side to preload the system (*a la* Shimano, though here it's a ring between the crank arm and BB, not a removable plastic dial) and is relatively straightforward.

Once on, they feel good and stiff underfoot and the narrow/wide ring does its usual sterling chain retaining job. At 628g on our scales (without BB) they're a decent weight for alloy cranks too – something achieved not by hollowing out the arms but by forging and machining a latticework of 'pockets' on the inside of the arms. We were worried these would fill up with mud but they haven't clogged so far. **JCW**

MBUK

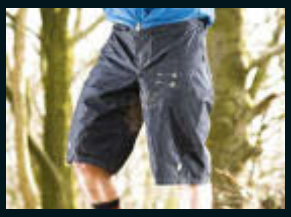
Versatile XC/trail cranks that stand out from the crowd and are ideal for single-ring fans

MBUK

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Brand New Kit

THE SMALL STUFF
MTB BITS AND PIECES



TENN OUTDOORS PROTEAN WATERPROOF SHORTS

£17.99 **Tenn Outdoors**
www.tenn-outdoors.co.uk

These shorts have quite a boxy cut and aren't the most breathable but keep crap weather out admirably for the price. The two hip pockets have waterproof zips and there are useful waist adjusters. ROB

MBUK ★★★★☆



SEALSKINZ MID WEIGHT WATERPROOF SOCKS

£32 (mid length) **SealSkinz**
www.sealskinz.com

These socks will keep your feet dry when hammering through puddles or showers, though in downpours water can run down your leg and into the top and they don't stay up as well as SealSkinz' thinner socks. ROB

MBUK ★★★☆☆



SKRATCH LABS EXERCISE HYDRATION MIX

£1.50 (single serving), £24.95 (10 servings)
Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com

This sports drink is made using cane sugar (instead of complex processed sugars that can cause stomach upsets), flavoured with real fruit and tastes really good. It replaces lost electrolytes and gives a slight energy boost. JIMMER

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Alpinestars All Mountain jacket

£199.95 **i-ride** www.i-ride.co.uk

THE ALL MOUNTAIN jacket is a sturdy bit of kit that does a great job of keeping rain and mud at bay on the nastiest of days. The solid construction means it's better suited to colder temperatures, but thanks to the two large, zipped vents and the fabric's breathability, it takes a while to get clammy on warmer wet days too.

We found ourselves using the two large zipped pockets constantly, while hem, cuff and hood adjustment makes it easy to cinch things up for a good fit. There are some useful internal stash pockets, the high collar provides a great barrier against the elements and the fleece lining means it's nice and comfy.

Our medium sample came up quite big but that means there's room for layering up underneath or fitting over body armour. The dropped rear helps protect your bum from spray, which is handy on all-dayers. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★½☆



Hope Retainer chainring

£45 **Hope Technology**
www.hopetech.com

IT SEEMS LIKE everyone's jumping on the SRAM bandwagon and making thick/thin-toothed single chainrings these days, including Hope Technology. Like everything else they do, Hope's version is machined in Lancashire, with laser etched logos and a black, silver or gold anodised finish. A deep double-sided scoop on the base ring keeps it lighter than most at 43g, with little scoops under each tooth to let mud squeeze out too. It's reasonably quiet, reassuringly secure and we've had a long-term one on the go for ages that's still running fine. This 30t version has built-in bolt threads for easy fitting too. **GUY**

MBUK ★★★½☆

Leatt 3DF Hybrid knee pads



£70 **Hotlines** www.hotlines-uk.com

THE LATEST KNEE pads from safety supremos Leatt feature a 'hybrid' construction that combines both hard and soft protection. Malleable 3DF padding takes care of the central knee cup and side impact sections, while there's a hardshell lower pad to offer some extra protection for your lower knee and upper shin.

The elasticated straps use a Velcro fastening and run through a buckle too so you can really get the balance right between comfort and security. The mesh rear and large cutaway mean that while the pads are reassuringly bulky up front, they're relatively cool and extremely comfortable to wear on longer rides.

There's minimal mushrooming when pedalling too, which is always a bonus, and they're also available in blue or white in case you're not into fluoro. Whether you ride downhill or enduro, the 3DF Hybrids offer a great balance between security and comfort. **RIC**

MBUK ★★★★☆



Joystick 8-BIT handlebar

£69.99 **Hookit Products** www.hookitproducts.co.uk

JOYSTICK STARTED LIFE in Canada but their range has recently been getting a lot of love in the UK and we're not surprised. The 8-BIT bar is a seriously wide (800mm) piece of smoothly tapering pipe that adds masses of steering leverage. At 304g it's on par with other similarly wide bars for weight and it's got a reassuringly solid but not hand-tinglingly stiff feel on the trail. The six-degree upsweep is slightly steeper than normal though, which is obvious once you get to the tips, and while a nine-degree backsweep is standard these days, the extra width makes it feel like you're running a 10mm shorter stem than you actually are. **GUY**

MBUK ★★★½☆

OneUp RADr rear mech cage

US$55 (approx £36) **OneUp Components** www.oneupcomponents.com

ADDING A 42-TOOTH 'crawler cog' to your 1x10 drivetrain may make the climbs easier but it also leaves a big gap between sprockets that can cause shifting problems, or at least require painstaking set-up. Enter OneUp with the RADr cage. Designed to replace both cages on your Shimano Shadow Plus rear mech, it moves the top jockey wheel backwards for better shifting between the big sprockets.

It's straightforward to fit, though you need to disassemble your mech and a seized stop screw on our SLX unit meant we had to get the mole grips out. Shifting to and from the 42t sprocket is noticeably improved and seems just as slick as usual elsewhere. We can't comment on durability yet but the 7075-T6 aluminium cage has a low profile to help keep it out of the way of rocks.

Add in the cost of a OneUp 42t sprocket (US$90) and it's still more affordable than the cheapest 1x11 option – a Shimano XTR cassette, mech, shifter and chain at £452. But if you don't need such a wide range of gears, a 40t cog offers many of the benefits with no need for a new cage. **JCW**



MBUK

A worthwhile upgrade if you're desperate for a 42t sprocket but can't afford to go 11-speed

★★★½☆

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Six of the Best

CLIPLESS TRAIL SHOES

Why upgrade...?

"Shoes with the right balance of comfort, efficiency and grip can help ensure you have maximum fun on the trails. We've tested six with a plethora of pedals and in a range of conditions to see how they really compare."



Scott MTB Team Boa

Scott www.scott-sports.com

SO GOOD... They may look like 'disco slipper' XC shoes but the MTB Teams are trail ready and easy to live with. Markings on the sole make cleat alignment a snap, the outsole grips well in mud, and they're just 401g per shoe (size 46). The footbed provides comfy support and the metatarsal button and arch support can be removed to tailor the fit.
NO GOOD... Despite Scott's stiffness rating of eight out of nine, the sole feels flexier than most here – we could feel our platform-less Shimano Race pedals when pushing hard. The upper becomes uncomfortable around the ankle when done up tightly enough to prevent heel lift too.

MBUK 2.5/5



Specialized Comp MTB

Specialized www.specialized.com

SO GOOD... The Comps only achieve six out of 13 on Specialized's stiffness index but are among the stiffest-feeling shoes here. The tacky outsole grips well on rock and mud thanks to large rubber toe treads. The Body Geometry footbed offers superb arch support, and some testers reported reduced knee pain too.
NO GOOD... Some riders find the metatarsal button uncomfortable. The deep, narrow cleat channel doesn't sync well with Shimano Trail pedals (this can be remedied with a cleat spacer) and even with Race pedals, engagement is stiff. They need to be fastened tightly to prevent heel lift.

MBUK 3/5



Northwave Scorpius SRS

i-ride www.i-ride.co.uk

SO GOOD... Efficient, reasonably light (436g) and well vented, these are a good summer option. The carbon-powder reinforced thermoplastic sole feels very stiff, and the Slim Ratchet System (SRS) provides a secure and comfortable fit that helps boost power transfer further, with minimal heel lift. The outsole grips well on soft ground.
NO GOOD... The heavily perforated upper just isn't practical for colder days, and the hard tread makes walking on rock – or those moments when you can't quite clip in – rather dicey. The thin footbed offers little arch support, which means the shoes can become uncomfortable on long rides.

MBUK 3/5



Mavic Alpine

Mavic www.mavic.co.uk

SO GOOD... They may look like those trainers you had as a kid, but like their bigger brothers the Alpine XLs, these sport a tacky and deep-treaded Contagrip outsole that provides superb traction on rock and mud. The sole's flex is a boon to walking too. The wide, uninterrupted cleat channel aids engagement, and the no-frills laces and Velcro strap closure holds the foot comfortably and securely if done up tight.
NO GOOD... That flexy sole sacrifices some pedalling efficiency, which is noticeable when sprinting hard. We missed the 'Quick Lace' drawstring fastening system of the Alpine XLs too.

MBUK 4/5



Giro Privateer

Zyro www.zyro.co.uk

SO GOOD... Despite being the lightest shoes on test at 395g, these are also among the comfiest. The thickly padded upper ratchets up quickly to hold the foot snugly, eliminating heal lift without feeling tight. The wide cleat channel makes pedal engagement easy and the sole is thicker around the cleat to boost stiffness where it's needed. The tread grips well in mud.
NO GOOD... The outsole is quite hard, so these aren't the grippiest shoes on hard surfaces or on pedals. Under hard pedalling there's slight flex across the middle part of the sole compared to the stiffest shoes on test.

MBUK 4/5



Shimano M089

Madison www.madison.co.uk

SO GOOD... The M089s are surprisingly stiff for their weight (432g) and cost thanks to the heavily corrugated nylon sole. As you'd expect, they engage just fine with Shimano's own Trail and Race pedals, and work well with CrankBrothers' Mallets too. The upper secures the foot without pressure points, and combined with the supportive footbed, makes them extremely comfy. The rubberised outsole provides excellent grip.
NO GOOD... Doing the ratchet strap up tightly caused a crease to form on the uppers on our pair, though this wasn't particularly uncomfortable. A more aggressive toe tread would help with muddy walking.

MBUK 4.5/5


SENTIER
VR
WINNER OF MBR'S 'HARDTAIL OF THE YEAR' - THE NEW & IMPROVED SENTIER VR 2015
RRP £949.99
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HARDTAIL of the YEAR
WINNER
2014
VITUS
WWW.VITUSBIKES.COM
EXCLUSIVELY
AVAILABLE FROM
Chain Reaction cycles.com

ROB'S CANYON STRIVE CF 9.0 RACE

£3,746.98 (inc shipping & packaging) **Canyon** www.canyon.com



It's finally arrived! After months of anticipation, my Strive CF has landed here at *MBUK* Towers. Having never personally received a bike from a direct-buy company like Canyon before, I was intrigued to see exactly how they pack and ship everything to the customer, and how much spannering time I'd need before the Strive was ready to roll. Turns out it's not a whole lot if you have half a clue what you're doing, though I can see how a full-suspension bike with a fork, shock and geometry/travel adjusting Shapeshifter system to set up could bamboozle those with less experience and have them running to the nearest bike shop for help. Fortunately Canyon include an instruction manual that's easily as thick as the *Yellow Pages* and covers just about everything you need to know. It's this sales model that's enabled the German company to equip bikes like the Strive CF with such a droolworthy spec list at such a low price (when compared to other carbon bikes).

My interest in the Strive developed after seeing the 'bag' on Joe Barnes and Fabien Barel's prototype race bikes at the early enduro races in 2013. Underneath this shroud sat the Shapeshifter piston, which tweaks the Strive's geometry, spring rate and travel at the push of a bar-mounted lever. The cynic in me was already asking questions. How much difference would the Shapeshifter really make and could I see myself using it in a race situation? How would it hold up after a solid year of riding? Important questions that I intend to answer.

The other appealing thing Canyon are now offering is longer 'Race' geometry. Inspired by Barel, who helped develop Mondraker's Forward Geometry, the Race version of the Strive CF has an effective top tube that's 29mm longer than on the standard bike, though the chainstays remain the same length, a short 423mm.

So far I've only managed a short ride on the Strive, but after a bit of practice, the Shapeshifter system is becoming more intuitive to use and does seem to have a marked effect on climbing efficiency. In downhill mode, I'm still a little way off pushing this 160mm (6.3in) travel machine to its limit – it's certainly not afraid of going fast!

MBUK Machines

We ride these long-term test bikes hard for a year, constantly scrutinising new kit, to bring you nothing but the truth about their performance



Rob's blue enduro bomber is finally unboxed and ready to rip



With plenty of miles under his belt and Grip Shift on his bar, Matt was all set for Finland

MATT'S SURLY ICE CREAM TRUCK OPS

£2,199.99 **Ison Distribution** www.ison-distribution.com



The build-up to the Rovaniemi 150 snow race (see page 101) has dominated my riding for the past few months. I've been getting in as many miles as possible, which has meant using the ICT for my 36km daily commute with the tyres at a super-low (for tarmac) 5-6psi to add extra resistance. I've also found a new weekend route to help me up my mileage. Adding another 36km and 1,500m of climbing to a week's worth of commuting has led to a dramatic increase in fitness, and while the Surly won't set any records on this XC loop, it's proved very capable in some pretty wet and muddy sections.

In my original write-up I mentioned that the microSHIFT thumbshifters were a bone of contention. Though potentially perfect for use with thick gloves in snowy conditions, they were clumsy and difficult to use at speed on normal trails. Looking for an alternative that would suit both adventure riding and days at the trail centre, I settled on SRAM's Grip Shift system. The twist shifters have an excellent reliability reputation and allow for easier and faster shifting than thumbies. They also take up less room on the handlebar, making it easier to fit the bag and pogies (glove covers) needed for my trip to Lapland.

The switch to Grip Shift meant fitting new SRAM mechs too. The ICT has modular dropouts but I couldn't get hold of the right chips for a 12mm axle and standard SRAM/Shimano rear mech (the original SLX mech was a direct-mount unit) so I switched to vertical dropouts and used one of Hope's mighty 197mm QR skewers to hold everything in place.

JIMMER'S MARIN MOUNT VISION C-XM8

£3,500 **Paligap** www.paligap.cc



This month I've ditched the tubes. It was a no-brainer because the Marin's Easton Vice XLT rims are UST (Universal Standard Tubeless) certified and the Schwalbe Nobby Nic tyres are tubeless ready, and only took a few hassle-free minutes. I've been impressed with the new Nobby Nics. They hold a tight line across off-camber roots and rocks and in the muck, have super-tough sidewalls and are pretty light for such robust tyres. I want to swap to the softer TrailStar version up front to add more grip though. »



With no tubes to puncture, Jimmer can really let loose

OLLY'S GIANT REIGN 27.5 1

£3,999 **Giant Bicycles** www.giant-bicycles.com



With rain upping the sketchy levels on my favourite trails I've had to play around with tyres to help keep me upright, swapping the TrailStar compound Schwalbe Magic Mary to the rear and introducing a softer VertStar version up front. Drag on the climbs has increased but not to the point where it's holding me back, and the grip where it counts is worth it.

The RockGuardZ carbon mudguard I fitted a few months ago is doing a superb job of keeping the dirt out of my face too, without looking awful. Hope's new cranks have also made their way on to the Reign for testing, along with their new push-fit bottom bracket and narrow/wide ring, replacing the stock SRAM units. Superbly stiff and engineered to perfection, this is one seriously good crankset.

As the miles have racked up, a few limitations have become apparent. The Giant's low (340mm) BB requires careful consideration on technical trails and the superb RockShox Monarch Plus shock and Maestro linkage pairing highlights the shortfalls of the Dual Position Air Pike up front – the fixed-travel Solo Air version of the fork would offer more support and stability where it counts. After initially feeling odd I've got used to the 46mm offset in the fork crown, but I'd like to try a regular 42mm offset to see the difference.

The low BB's less of a problem when you're several feet up in the air



GUY'S GT FORCE X CARBON EXPERT

£3,499.99 **GT Bicycles** www.gtbicycles.com



The fork test may be done for this year but the GT is still putting the latest spring sticks through their paces. I'm having to be careful with my conclusions though because the super-butted Spank Vibrocore bar (see this month's Wrecked & Rated) really does seem to have a significant impact-reducing effect, as well as being a bang-on colour sync for the GT. I've got new wheels to plug in, along with Vee Rubber tyres. Lucky I'm still loving riding it then.



JAKE'S SARACEN MYST PRO

£2,999.99 **Madison** www.madison.co.uk



The Myst's rear tyre looks as if it's been attached to the back wheels of a drift car, and the mech and hanger were destroyed by a rock a couple of days before I flew home from my two-month riding trip to New Zealand. Overall, the Saracen has been a shining example of a low-maintenance steed though, considering it did two years' worth of UK riding during my time away – that's if you rode 15 runs a day, both days, every weekend.



JCW'S STANTON SHERPA 853

£500 (frame) **Stanton Bikes** www.stantonbikes.com



Last month I was struggling with the Sherpa's steering due to the inertia of the 29in wheels and the head-angle-slackening 120mm (4.7in) fork. To remedy this I've flipped the stem and widened the bar. Yep, you heard right – while most bars have to be cut to size, ODI's Flight Control II comes with 'Wingtip' extensions. Going from 750mm to 776mm has made a massive difference, pulling my weight over the front wheel for extra grip and giving me loads more leverage. »

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A grippier front tyre has upped the aggression levels, and there's more in the pipeline

GUY'S WHYTE T-130 SX

£1,999 **Whyte Bikes** www.whyte.bike



While we've only just started featuring it on these pages, we've actually been riding this most affordable version of Whyte's new mid-travel trail rager since July. What's most impressive is how well (almost) everything has held up so far.

The X-Fusion dropper post fell victim to cable damage and general lever tension hypersensitivity, so that needs sending back for a service. The Giant post that's standing in for now works fine as long as you crank the saddle clamp up like a truck wheel nut. It's probably time to have a look inside the 130mm (5.1in) travel Suntour Aion fork too because it's not nearly as gentle on our wrists as it was nine months ago. Given that it's sucked up everything from a first date at the 'Ard Rock Enduro to a full winter of filthy moorland work, we're not surprised it needs some TLC.

On a side note, while adding more travel to a bike is always a temptation, the Whyte proves this doesn't always work out. We plugged a 150mm (5.9in) Magura fork in, and even though the linear stroke meant ride height was relatively low, the T-130 still felt jacked up and precarious compared to its usual hunkered-down hold on the trail. We may try a 140mm (5.5in) fork to see if we can get away with that, but they tend to be something of a no-man's-land between shortened stroke bigger forks that are overweight, and stretched versions of lighter forks that are too twangy.

Apart from being a bit short, the bike works well with its current geometry so there's no rush to tweak how it behaves. Fitting Continental's new affordable version of their well knobbled, large volume Mountain King II tyre up front has given it a lot more bite and cornering balls. With a big wheels test just around the corner, we can see it getting some fatter rims. There's likely a single-ring conversion floating around in the component crystal ball too, even if the current Race Face/Shimano set-up is still running fine.

SPEC DECK

CONTINENTAL MOUNTAIN KING II 27.5X2.4IN TYRE **£32.95** www.conti-tyres.co.uk

GIANT CONTACT SL SWITCH DROPPER POST **£169.99** www.giant-bicycles.com

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BUDGET TRAIL FULL-SUSSERS

Words Seb Rogers **Pics** Steve Behr



THE TESTER

Seb Rogers
Full suspension was an exotic rarity when Seb first started reviewing bikes for *MBUK* in 1996. Years of trail riding experience mean he's perfectly placed to pick a winner in this test.

Nothing beats a well sorted full-suspension bike for all-round trail devouring versatility. With enough travel on tap you can ride further, faster and in more comfort – and have even more fun in the process.

But what should you be looking for? Everyone has their own idea of what the ideal amount of rear wheel travel is, but to keep things sane – in terms of pedalling efficiency and weight – we reckon 150mm (5.9in) is about the maximum for all-round use. At the other end of the scale, less than 120mm (4.7in) is nudging towards cross-country race territory, and that's not what we're looking for either.

We've picked four of the most promising looking yet sensibly priced bikes we could find and taken them out on the trails for a proper drubbing. A trail bike should be capable and confidence inspiring at any speed and on any surface – no small feat for a bike designer to pull off. It should be light enough to make climbs easily manageable but stiff enough not to bounce and flex off line when the hits are coming thick and fast on rough descents. Which of these four is best? Time to hit the trails and find out...

THE LINE-UP



GT SENSOR COMP
£1,499.99



VITUS ESCARPE
£1,499.99



GHOST KATO FS 5
£1,549.99



MERIDA ONE-FORTY 7. 500 £1,600





GHOST KATO FS 5

£1,499.99 *Mid-travel mid-ranger with a great spec*

SO GOOD

Reasonable weight and taut-feeling rear end make for a lively feel on the trail

Great equipment spec for the money

NO GOOD

Nervous high-speed handling thanks to QR front axle, long stem and narrow bar

JARGON BUSTER

Horst Link
This four-bar design – named after its inventor, Horst Leitner – uses a chainstay pivot to isolate the bike's suspension from pedalling and braking forces.

Occupying a slot in the middle of Ghost's Kato full-suspension trail bike range, the FS 5 is the kind of bike that should have broad appeal. With 120mm (4.7in) of rear and 130mm (5.1in) of front wheel travel, Fox Float CTD air springs at both ends and a kitlist that majors on Shimano Deore but throws in a smattering of XT stardust for good measure, it'll tick a lot of boxes on a lot of riders' wishlists. The question is, does the reality live up to the spec list?

The frame

With its elegantly curved hydroformed tubes and classic four-bar rear end, Ghost haven't tried to reinvent the wheel – or the full-suspension trail bike – with the Kato. The low pivot point, Horst Link style chainstay pivots and rocker-driven, vertically-mounted shock are all straight out of the *How To Build a Full-Suspension Bike* book. It's a tried, tested and trusted system that's been around, in one form or another, for over 20 years now.

Neat touches include pivot bolts with visible torque settings and that Fox Float CTD rear shock – a comparatively rare sight on a full-susser at this price. Even though most riders will probably leave the shock's CTD lever in the 'trail' setting most of the time, it's good to have the option of adding more low-speed compression damping for non-technical climbs and road sections ('climb'), or running the shock fully open for the downhills ('descend').

Plugged into the chunky, tapered head tube up front is a matching Fox 32 Float CTD fork. Aside from the novelty of finding a paired Fox set-up at this price, there are no surprises here in terms of performance. What is a surprise is Ghost's choice of a standard quick-release axle at both ends. We're used to seeing a 135mm axle at the rear at this price in a nod to cost cutting, but a 130mm fork with tapered steerer but no 15mm axle is an anachronism. The improved torsional rigidity of the steerer is pretty much cancelled out by the flexy noodliness of the QR axle – it's a bit like locking the front door but leaving the back door wide open to all and sundry.

The equipment

In this company, the Kato's kit aces the competition – on paper, at least. Full Shimano Deore stop-and-go bits, with a crowd-pleasing upgrade to an XT rear mech, make for a good looking, slick operating set of controls that should provide many, many miles of trouble free service. Schwalbe's ubiquitous Nobby Nic treads work reasonably well in any conditions you care to throw at them too, while the own-brand finishing kit gets on with the job in hand – although by current standards the 700mm bar is a bit narrow and the 80mm stem a tad long.

The ride

With an all-up weight (13.4kg/29.5lb) that puts the Kato among the lighter mid-travel £1,500 full-sussers out there, you'd expect a lively ride. You won't be disappointed. Grippy tyres on reasonably light wheels hook up well and accelerate quickly, giving the Ghost a hint of XC racing inspired eagerness that's lacking from a lot of trail full-bouncers at this price. It's still nudging the psychological 30lb barrier, but the Kato can be hussled along a trail in a way that some of the heavier competition struggles to match.

Backing up this get-up-and-go liveliness is a rear end that walks the fine line between responsiveness and



THE REAR END DELIVERS A FAIRLY FIRM FEEL THAT TAKES THE EDGE OFF HITS WITHOUT DESCENDING INTO WALLOWY MUSHINESS

comfort. The conventional four-bar suspension configuration paired with the CTD shock in 'trail' mode delivers a fairly firm feel that some riders will love, taking the edge off hits without ever descending into wallowy mushiness. The downside to this firm connectedness is the need for more rider input on slower, more technical lines – the Ghost isn't a bike that you can simply sit down and pedal up a rocky, steppy climb on.

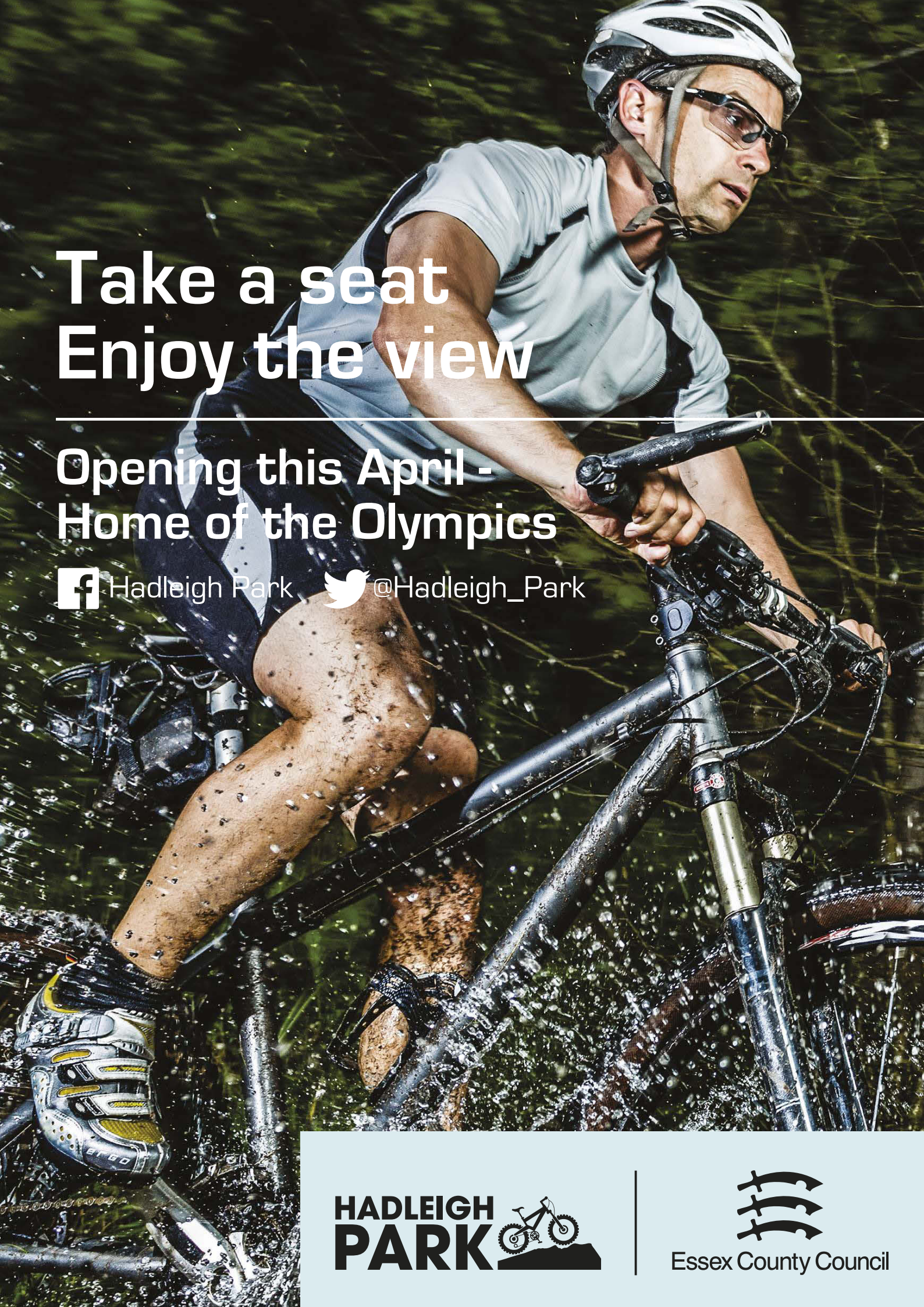
It's as the pace picks up and the trail gets trickier that the Kato begins to come unstuck. Despite a fashionably relaxed head angle, the combination of a comparatively short wheelbase with a long stem, narrow handlebar and noodly fork makes for a squirelly handful on fast, steep or rocky descents.

The rear end's 120mm of travel doesn't have the bottomless feel of some of the competition, but the fork would easily handle more if only it were possible to keep it pointing in the right direction. Some of the nervousness could be tamed by fitting a slightly shorter stem and wider bar, but what the Ghost really needs is what most mid-travel full-sussers have had for a while – a 15mm through-axle holding the front wheel in the end of the fork. And that's not an easy or cheap upgrade to make. »

MBUK

Great value on paper and good-looking in the metal, but vague high-speed handling needs some spec changes to sort

★★★☆☆



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MERIDA ONE-FORTY 7. 500

£1,600 *Budget-minded bruiser with big-hit aspirations*

SO GOOD

Lots of travel for not very much money

Impressively stable and competent on fast, rough descents

NO GOOD

Virtual pivot point set-up with aggressive compression damping means reduced small bump sensitivity

Basic fork limits downhill performance

JARGON BUSTER

Hydroforming
Technique of manufacturing tubes by forcing liquid under high pressure into pre-formed moulds, compressing the metal in the process.

Merida offer full-sussers in three travel configurations – 120mm (4.7in), 140mm (5.5in) and 160mm (6.3in) – with the two longer-travel bikes using a proprietary virtual pivot suspension design. With a RockShox fork, Fox shock, 180mm brake rotors and a dropper post, the One-Forty 7. 500 has hard-hitting credentials. Can it deliver?

The frame

Merida's experience as one of the world's biggest bike manufacturers – they make frames for a lot of other brands too – shows through in the One-Forty's clean design and attention to detail. Hydroformed main tubes curve from the massive, tapered head tube back towards the seat tube, forming a strong and rigid structure into which to plug a 140mm fork. The bump eater in question – a RockShox Sektor – is a solid entry-level performer, with adjustable rebound damping and a lockout lever. There are plusher forks with more accurate steering, but it'd be churlish to grumble too much at this price.

The solid rear triangle is attached to the mainframe via a short, stout linkage at the bottom and a rocker driving the shock at the top. The lower shock mount sits inside the down tube, contributing to a clean look that doesn't betray any hint of the travel on tap. The shock is Fox's well-regarded Float CTD unit with a fairly aggressive compression damping tune. It's good to see adjustable low-speed compression damping on a bike at this price.

Internal gear cable routing continues the quiet, neat and tidy theme, though it'll make cable replacement a bit more of a chore down the line despite Merida's enlarged down tube exit. A wraparound chainstay protector works with the clutch-equipped rear mech to keep chain rattle to an absolute minimum. Mud clearance under the chainstay bridge is extremely tight – fans of chunky tyres need not apply.

The kit

Merida's own-brand tyres provide plenty of cushioning and a tenaciously grippy open tread pattern. Fitted to Swiss DT rims spinning on unbranded hubs, they make for a reasonably light and lively wheelset that should stand up to some abuse. The choice of 180mm discs – which dissipate heat better than smaller rotors – makes sense, but we're surprised to see a 3x10 transmission on a bike with a gravity bent. A double-and-bash set-up would suit the One-Forty better.

The wide bar and stubby stem make it easy to muscle the front end over and around whatever surprises the trail throws up, while the KS Supernatural dropper post is a welcome spec bonus that'll open up steeper, faster downhill lines to adventurous riders.

The ride

Merida's virtual pivot design creates a higher effective pivot point, changing the axis around which the rear axle rotates in the process. A high pivot point gives the rear axle a slight rearward arc as the suspension compresses, which is ideal for dealing with bigger hits. That's why the system is used on Merida's longer-travel bikes.

There's no doubt that the One-Forty is in its element on fast, rough trails. Drop the seatpost, hunker down behind the wide bar and the virtual pivot system does its job, devouring trail detritus as though it's not there, while the rigid frame structure helps keep everything pointing straight and »



THE ONE-FORTY IS IN ITS ELEMENT ON FAST, ROUGH TRAILS, DEVOURING TRAIL DETRITUS AS THOUGH IT'S NOT THERE

true. The fork will give up long before the frame throws in the towel – a limitation of its basic internals that a long-term upgrade would take care of.

The downside of a high pivot point is that it causes chain growth through the bike's travel, which can be felt as a slight inchworm effect as the One-Forty rolls over bumps on granny-ring climbs. The shock's aggressive compression tune helps minimise this, but also reduces the suspension's effectiveness over small bumps. This gives the Merida a firm, connected feel at slow speeds, but this is a bike that needs coaxing and cajoling up technical climbs – there's no sitting back and letting the suspension suck the rear wheel to the ground here.

In practice this leaves the One-Forty trying hard to please everyone and ultimately not quite succeeding. At speed it's far better than you'd expect for the money, but slow down and the limitations of the high effective pivot point suck much of the ground-hugging ability out of the suspension. If you live for the descents and ride fast and hard, it may be just the ticket. But for all-round ability, there are better options out there. »

MBUK

Going with a virtual pivot for 140mm of travel makes sense, but it also compromises small bump sensitivity

★★★☆☆

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ABTA No.Y3374



GT SENSOR AL COMP

£1,549.99 *Reworked Independent Drivetrain system in wallet-friendly form*

SO GOOD

Stiff, accurate rear suspension works well on everything from big hits to small ones

Chassis is easily capable of being ridden hard and fast on harsh terrain

NO GOOD

Short, steep geometry is at odds with the bike's big-hit potential and makes the front end needlessly twitchy

JARGON BUSTER

Pedal feedback
Suspension systems that alter the length of the chain as they compress cause tension in the drivetrain, which can be felt as slight changes in resistance at the pedals

GT's Independent Drivetrain suspension set-up – where the bottom bracket 'floats' between the main frame and rear end – has been around in various incarnations for many years. The latest variation on the theme repackages everything to lower the Sensor's centre of gravity and make it lighter and stiffer. The AL Comp props up the bottom of the range, combining matched X-Fusion shocks with a SRAM transmission and Shimano brakes. But is it any good?

The frame

There's a lot of linkage gubbins and complicated-looking hydroforming going on around the Sensor's nether regions, but the principle of the Independent Drivetrain is fairly straightforward. The system's pivot point is high, giving the rear axle a slightly rearward path as it compresses through its travel. This is good news for small-bump sensitivity but bad news in terms of pedalling feedback. So GT isolate the transmission from the effects of chain growth with the Path Link rocker – a stout clamshell affair that ties the mainframe, chainstays, BB and shock together. As the suspension compresses, the BB moves back slightly to counter the rear axle's rearward movement. The result is less pedal feedback and, supposedly, better bump eating. All the weight associated with the suspension is low and centred around the BB, which should be good news for handling.

Independent Drivetrain bikes have generally been a little portly, but the new set-up doesn't appear to carry a weight penalty over other mid-travel bikes. It's a shame about the QR rear end though – a 142x12mm axle would stiffen things up. X-Fusion provide the fork and shock, offering 130mm (5.3in) of rock-munching travel with adjustable rebound damping and a lockout lever at each end. The fork is a match for budget units from bigger brands, but our shock suffered from the same negative air chamber leak-down we've encountered on other X-Fusion shocks. We had to remove and replace the air can in order to recharge it and cure the initially harsh top-out. It's a simple procedure, but irritating that it has to be done at all.

The equipment

SRAM's mid-range transmissions don't tend to fare quite so well in long-term use as the Shimano equivalents, but the X5 derailleurs and shifters fitted to the GT provided clean shifts. We're not convinced by the choice of WTB Bee Line tyres though. Although they contribute to a light and lively-feeling wheelset that rolls quickly on dry, hardpacked trails, they quickly become a scary handful in typically greasy British riding conditions. We'd switch them for something with a deeper, more open tread unless you always ride on well-drained trails.

The ride

GT's engineers have done their homework. While there are easier ways to build a rear suspension system, the Path Link rocker, compact rear end and low-mounted shock build into a noticeably stiff set-up that gets on with its job without fuss. Even without the belt-and-braces rigidity of a 142x12mm axle, the high-pivot system delivers on its promise of devouring big, fast and square-edged hits with impressive alacrity. The good news for all-round trail use is that this high-speed rock swallowing doesn't come at the expense of low-speed sensitivity.

Isolating the transmission from (most of) the effects of chain »



THE HIGH-PIVOT SYSTEM DELIVERS ON ITS PROMISE OF DEVOURING BIG, FAST AND SQUARE-EDGED HITS WITH IMPRESSIVE ALACRITY

growth, combined with the slight rearward arc of the rear axle path, gives the Sensor an impressive ground-hugging ability on low-speed technical climbs. The 'point, sit down and pedal' approach will get you up most things, and the subtle back-and-forward motion of the bottom bracket sounds a lot more distracting than it really is.

On the face of it, then, GT should have created an ideal all-round trail bike. The trouble is, they've also hobbled it with short, steep geometry that's more cross-country race than all-day trail warrior. While this works fine at lower speeds and on tamer trails, steeper gradients and trickier lines will have you reaching for the anchors long before the fork or rear end have thrown in the towel. Nervous handling isn't what you want on a bike that's capable of swallowing boulder fields whole.

This leaves the Sensor with a split personality. Too heavy to be a true racer but not laidback enough to mix it with the best of the bigger-travel trail bikes, it suffers from not being able to make up its mind what it wants to be. And that's a shame, because after years of development, the Independent Drivetrain system is pretty well sorted. »

MBUK

There's lots to like about the Sensor, but its impressive trail-devouring credentials are spoiled by its geometry

★★★☆☆

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VITUS ESCARPE

£1,499.99 *Pacy rock-swallower gets a 2015 makeover*

SO GOOD

Great handling in all trail scenarios, from eyeball-watering to walking pace

Superbly plush suspension makes light work of technical climbs and rocky descents

NO GOOD

Fork can be twangy on bigger hits

Short crank arms don't have any benefit that we can see

JARGON BUSTER

Double and bash Crankset with twin chainrings and an outer bash plate to protect the largest ring from damage.

The Escarpe is the Swiss Army knife of Vitus's value-conscious range – a go anywhere, ride anything kind of a bike that's designed to do most things well. For 2015 it's had a ground-up rethink, with the old four-bar suspension and slightly industrial looks replaced with a more sophisticated floating shock system, complete with plenty of angular hydroforming and complex CAD cleverness. With 135mm (5.3in) of rear travel, 140mm (5.5in) up front and a 2x10 transmission it's a good deal on paper, but what's it like to ride?

The frame

The Vitus's squared-off tubes and pronounced swage lines make it look for all the world like a praying mantis that's fallen into a vat of dayglo paint, but don't let that put you off. The detail is impressive. From the way the shock rocker follows the line of the seatstays to the stiff, welded clamshell chainstay yoke, the new Escarpe is a big step up from the old in terms of both appearance and function.

Anchoring the shock to one end of the swingarm has allowed Vitus to fine tune the shock rate through the suspension's travel. The initial movement has a slight falling rate, allowing the bike to sit comfortably into its sag position. As the suspension compresses, the lower shock mount moves forward slightly, flattening out the spring rate towards the end of the stroke to make full use of the available travel. This suspension cleverness has necessitated chopping a big chunk out of the seat tube, but it's done so neatly that it barely spoils the bike's tidy lines. There's even room to run cables for a remote dropper post.

Suspension duties are handled by an unusual pairing – a RockShox Monarch R at the rear and a Manitou Minute Comp – in 140mm trim – up front. The shock doesn't have adjustable compression damping but the preset compression tune is actually a pretty good companion to the Vitus's supple rear suspension. And the Manitou is a match for other price-equivalent air forks, adding the distinctive looks of its rearward-facing brace for good measure.

The equipment

The WTB rims and tyres hook up well in most conditions, though they're not the lightest 650b wheels we've seen. The 2x10 transmission – based around an FSA double-and-bash crankset and Shimano Deore chain-shunting kit – suits the Escarpe's character down to the ground, serving up enough gears for most purposes while offering a bit more ground clearance than the 3x alternative. The 170mm crank arms are less convincing. They're actually the same length as standard 175mm arms, just with the pedal threads drilled 5mm further inboard, so you've got less torque at the pedalling coalface but the same ground clearance.

The ride

The Escarpe's vital statistics read like a wishlist for a modern trail bike. Slack head angle? Check. Short stays? Yup. Long reach? You betcha. Combined with the grippy tyres and 2x10 drivetrain, this means it's an incredibly easy bike to just jump on and stomp all over your favourite trails. The tight rear end helps keep the front wheel manageable in situations where you need to pick it up and manhandle it, while plenty of room to stretch out makes it easy to keep the Vitus pointing where you want it to, even on steep, slow, technical climbs.

This 'quick when you want it to be but stable when you need it' character



THE ESCARPE MAY NOT BE THE LIGHTEST TRAIL BIKE BUT IT'LL DEVOUR ANYTHING YOU PUT IN ITS PATH AND LEAVE YOU WITH A BIG GRIN

is backed up by a superbly supple and responsive suspension system. The floating shock delivers on its promise of plush, controlled travel, serving up the full 135mm on fast, rocky descents without ever feeling like it's reaching its limit. The fork – as so often at this price – is the weak link, matching the rear for plush but not stiffness, and becoming noticeably twangy on larger hits.

What's really impressive is the way the Escarpe climbs. The rear end's tendency to sit easily into the first 20 per cent of its travel, combined with a shock that's not had its plushness throttled with an overly harsh compression tune, makes for a ground-sucking rear wheel that simply rolls up and over anything in its path. Technical climbs are a simple matter of sit, point, pedal.

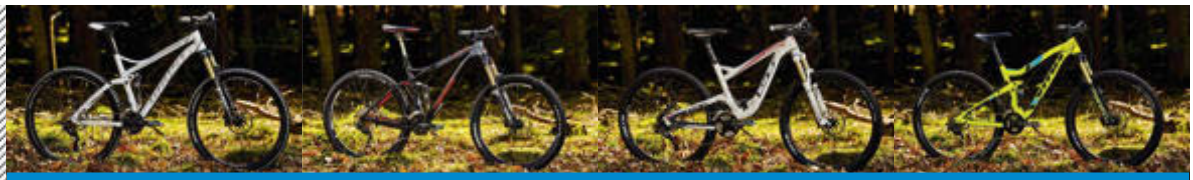
Ultimately it's the Vitus's all-round ability that convinces. The Escarpe may not be the lightest full-suspension trail bike on the market, nor the one with the most travel. But it'll devour anything you put in its path with impressive aplomb and leave you with a big grin on your face. And that can't be bad. »

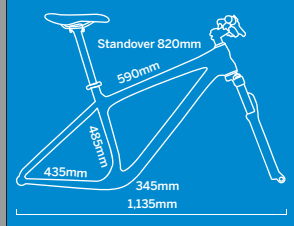
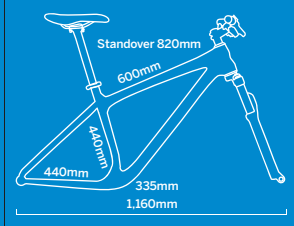
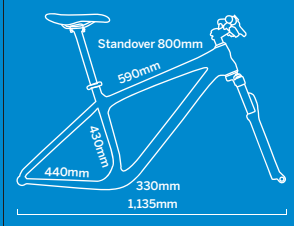
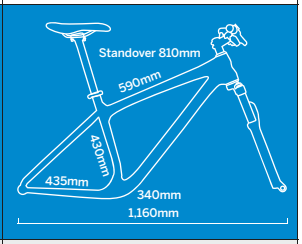
MBUK

There wasn't a great deal wrong with the old Escarpe, but the new one is better looking and amazing fun to ride

Bike Test
BUDGET TRAIL BIKES
£1,500-£1,600

THE SPEC DECK



	GHOST KATO FS 5	MERIDA ONE-FORTY 7. 500	GT SENSOR COMP	VITUS ESCARPE
PRICE	£1,549.99	£1,600	£1,499.99	£1,499.99
DISTRIBUTOR	**www.hotlines-uk.com**	**www.merida.com**	**www.gtbicycles.com**	**www.vitusbikes.com**
WEIGHT	13.4kg (29.5lb) without pedals	14.3kg (31.6lb) without pedals	13.7kg (30.2lb) without pedals	14.3kg (31.6lb) without pedals
FRAME	Aluminium, 120mm (4.7in) travel	Hydroformed aluminium, 140mm (5.5in) travel	Hydroformed 6069 aluminium, 130mm (5.1in) travel	Hydroformed 6061-T6 aluminium, 135mm (5.3in) travel
SIZES	XS, S, M (tested), L, XL	S, M (tested), L	XS, S, M (tested), L, XL	S, M (tested), L, XL
FORK	Fox Float CTD Evolution, 130mm (5.1in) travel	RockShox Sektor TK, 140mm (5.5in) travel	X-Fusion Velvet RL2, 130mm (5.1in) travel	Manitou Minute Comp, 140mm (5.5in) travel
SHOCK	Fox Float CTD XV	Fox Float CTD	X-Fusion O2 RL	RockShox Monarch R
HEADSET	Unbranded	Unbranded	Orbit	FSA
WHEELS	**Hubs:** Shimano Deore **Rims:** Ghost Ryde Rival 21 **Spokes:** Black, plain gauge **Wheel weight:** 1.9kg F, 2.5kg R (including tyres)	**Hubs:** Unbranded **Rims:** DT Swiss 533d **Spokes:** Black, plain gauge **Wheel weight:** 2kg F, 2.5kg R (including tyres)	**Hubs:** GT All Terra **Rims:** Alex DP21 **Spokes:** Black, double butted **Wheel weight:** 1.8kg F, 2.5kg R (including tyres)	**Hubs:** Formula **Rims:** WTB ST i23 TCS **Spokes:** Black, plain gauge **Wheel weight:** 2.2kg F, 2.6kg R (including tyres)
TYRES	Schwalbe Nobby Nic 27.5x2.25in	Merida Trail Lite 27.5x2.25in	WTB Bee Line 27.5x2.2in	WTB Vigilante 27.5x2.3in F, WTB Trail Boss 27.5x2.25in R
CRANKSET/ BOTTOM BRACKET	Shimano Deore, 22/30/40t/ Shimano	Shimano M523, 22/30/40t/ Shimano	FSA Gamma Drive MegaExo 22/32/44t/Shimano	FSA Gamma Drive, 24/36t/FSA
DERAILLEURS	Shimano Deore F, Shimano Deore XT Shadow Plus R	Shimano Deore F, Shimano Deore Shadow Plus R	SRAM X5	Shimano Deore F, Shimano Deore Shadow Plus R
SHIFTERS	Shimano Deore (3x10)	Shimano Deore (3x10)	SRAM X5 (3x10)	Shimano Deore (2x10)
CASSETTE/CHAIN	Shimano HG50, 11-36t/ Shimano HGX	Shimano HG50, 11-36t/ KMC X10	SRAM PG-1020, 11-36t/ KMC X10	Shimano HG50, 11/36t/ KMC X10
BRAKES	Shimano Deore M615, 180/180mm	Tektro Auriga, 180/180mm	Shimano M396, 180/180mm	Shimano M396, 180/180mm
BAR/STEM/GRIPS	Ghost Low Rizer Light, 700mm/ Ghost AS-GH1, 80mm/Ghost lock-on	Merida Pro OS, 740mm/Merida Pro OS, 60mm/Merida lock-on	GT All Terra, 745mm/GT All Terra, 65mm/GT lock-on	Vitus, 740mm/Vitus, 60mm/Vitus lock-on
SADDLE/ SEATPOST	Ghost VL 3315/Ghost Light SP DC1	Merida Sport 1/KS Supernatural	GT All Terra Colorado/GT All Terra	Vitus/Vitus
DIMENSIONS				
FRAME ANGLES	**Head** 67° **Seat** 71°	**Head** 66.5° **Seat** 74°	**Head** 68.5° **Seat** 74.5°	**Head** 66° **Seat** 74°
VERDICT	MBUK ★★★☆☆ **Great value on paper, but vague high-speed handling needs some spec changes to sort**	MBUK ★★★☆☆ **Virtual pivot set-up for 140mm of travel makes sense, but also compromises small-bump sensitivity**	MBUK ★★★☆☆ **Lots to like, but its impressive trail-devouring credentials are spoiled by its geometry**	MBUK ★★★★½ **There wasn't much wrong with the old Escarpe, but the new one is better looking and amazing to ride**

WHAT OUR SCORES MEAN: We give each bike one overall score to sum up how it performs and its value for money. If a bike gets a score of five, it really is the best you can get in terms of both

★☆☆☆☆ Poor: simply put, don't bother
★★☆☆☆ Below average: flawed in some way
★★★☆☆ Good: it'll do the job and do it well
★★★★☆ Very good: one of the best you can buy
★★★★★ Exceptional: a genuine class leader



FINAL VERDICT

On the one hand, mid-travel full-sussers offer more get-out-of-jail-free travel (and easier handling) than XC race sleds. On the other, they're lighter (and better to pedal) than more gravity-orientated bikes. That means they risk falling between two stools.

Merida's One-Forty 7. 500 comes down firmly in favour of big-hit ability. The trouble is that, in doing so, it doesn't really convince as an all-rounder – and also comes up a bit short in genuine big-hit ability. GT's Sensor Comp has a slightly different problem, offering genuine rock-swallowing plush in a package where the geometry says cross-country but the weight says trail. Ghost's Kato FS 5 is also frustratingly close to being a great all-round package, but desperately needs some spec tweaks to tame the front end.

Which just leaves the Vitus Escarpe. Although it could do with shedding some weight, what makes this bike the pick of this particular bunch is the convincing way it mixes fun and pace. Equally at home picking its way up a slow, technical climb or blasting down a steep, rocky chute, it's a thoroughly convincing rethink that should find its way on to any budget-minded rider's shortlist.

NEXT MONTH

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WRECKED & RATED

Group Test

HYDRATION PACKS

We've tested 15 trail backpacks to find out which one deserves the privilege of residing on your sweaty back

Words Ric McLaughlin **Pics** Andy McCandlish



BLADDER

The rubber bag and tube combo that you fill with water to keep yourself hydrated. Some packs don't come with a bladder, which means you'll need to factor buying one into the cost. You'll want a 2-3l capacity for longer rides.

SAFETY

Packs cover your back, the area most visible to motorists, so look out for reflective detailing and light loops to help keep you visible on night rides or commutes. Some even offer inbuilt spine protection.

STRAPS

These are vital to how comfortable the pack is to wear. Padding and adjustability are key but also look out for ergonomically cut straps that better fit your body. Some packs are available in a choice of lengths to offer an even better fit.

CAPACITY

The smallest packs offer just enough space for a bladder and a spare tube while others allow you to stuff a complete change of riding kit inside. Be honest about the type of riding you do and only buy a pack big enough to carry what you actually need.

STORAGE

Think realistically about what you take with you on your rides and work out how best to store it before investing in a new pack. Packs with designated tool storage can make trail fixes that little bit easier.

What to look for

We've got your back when it comes to packs

Not so long ago we all rode with glorified rucksacks strapped to our backs, but, like everything else in mountain biking, hydration packs have evolved. Of course, you can still get a basic 'bladder and straps' effort, but there are now packs offering myriad features and options. Here's how to find the perfect one for you.

The capacity of the pack should be your first consideration. The rise of enduro racing has brought with it a new breed of pack with an emphasis on stability rather than space. Some of these packs are even referred to as 'harnesses' and are designed to stay rigidly in place when the beeps start, only to afford a few sugary glugs of fuel before the long climb back up to the next stage. They're a great option if you ride short local loops and hate wedging tubes and tools into your pockets. Handily, they don't offer any room for your mates' jackets, phones or hods of bricks either.

So, are you looking for somewhere just to stow a bladder and car keys, or do you need a bit more space? Trail packs with 10 to 15l of storage are the next step up the ladder and are the preferred pack of the mountain biking masses, with enough storage for extra layers, food, water, tools and spares. Features such as easy-loading bladders, made-to-measure tool pockets, waterproof zips, rain covers and inbuilt emergency whistles are all well and good, but the pack won't cut the mustard if it's uncomfortable



to wear. You don't want it snagging on your helmet or bouncing around on the descents.

A good trail pack needs to be practical too, with easily accessible tool and spares pockets – if a bodge needs bodging, you don't want to have to drag everything out of your bag and into the rain – and tough enough to withstand crashes, brambles and being covered in mud.

Some of the biggest advances in riding pack technology have come in the form of integrated safety features. These range from rear light straps and reflective detailing to straps that won't interfere with a neck brace or body armour, and even integrated spine guards. Protecting your back is always a good idea, but the trade-off is usually a large foam or rubber insert that adds weight.

We ask more of the humble hydration pack than any other piece of riding kit. It must do everything so well that we don't even notice it's there despite having crammed it full of stuff, and it's always the very last item to be cleaned or looked after. All this use and abuse makes choosing the right one all the more important. »

MBUK Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE

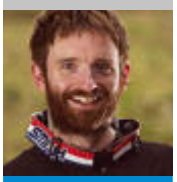
★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL:** A genuine class leader

★★★★☆ **VERY GOOD:** One of the best you can buy

★★★☆☆ **GOOD:** It'll do the job and do it well

★★☆☆☆ **BELOW AVERAGE:** Flawed in some way

★☆☆☆☆ **POOR:** Simply put, don't bother!



THE TESTER

Ric McLaughlin

Ric's the sort of man who can pick faults with a ham sandwich, so hydration packs offer him plenty of potential for critiquing and bellyaching on his daily rides in the Scottish Borders.

HOW WE TESTED THEM

TESTING A HYDRATION PACK starts from the minute we pull it out of the packaging and try to find out how best to route the drinking hose and continues until we're fishing around inside it, trying to locate the very last energy gel wrapper that we know is in there somewhere, coating everything in sticky sugar solution.

There are plenty of questions to answer. Does the bladder integrate easily with the bag? Do the straps offer enough adjustment? Does the pack stay in place through fast, choppy sections? Is all our kit soaked at the first hint of rain? Is there easy access to our tools when the hail's bashing off the side of our faces and our thumbs have gone numb? Is there a hook for an emergency rear light or any reflective detailing to ward off lorries? Are there side compression straps? Does the pack restrict movement in any way or crack off the back of our heads over jumps or drops?

The only way to test a hydration pack properly is to spend as much time riding with it on as possible. So that's what we've done, so you get the best insight possible.



JARGON BUSTER

> Bladder
Hydration bladders, also called reservoirs, are sealable rubber or polyurethane bags that stow in the rear of the pack. A plastic tube, or hose, runs to a mouthpiece for instant on-bike hydration. Some packs are sold with bladders, others without. Many riders have a preferred bladder style/brand that they'll stick with.

> CamelBak bladder
Bladder with a large circular filling cap and on/off mouthpiece lever.

> Sternum strap
Extra strap that runs across the chest to secure the pack and stop the shoulder straps tugging on you.

> Harness pack
New style of pack that offers minimal storage but maximum anchorage. Fantastic for short blasts, tech riding or enduro racing.

> Helmet net
This can be unfurled and fastened to points along the pack to carry your lid when not riding.

> Hydrapak bladder
Bladder that uses a sandwich bag style closure fastened with a slide-over plastic clamp for easy cleaning and drying. Mouthpiece can be locked with twisting motion.

> Light loop
Fabric loop where you can clip a rear light to get you home safely.

> Magnetised mouthpiece
Mouthpiece that snaps to a magnet on the chest strap to keep the hose neatly out of the way.

> Tool storage
Small pockets to keep tools/spares in place and your pack quiet.

> Waist strap
This helps keep the pack in place and support its weight. Some have useful integrated pockets.



POC VPD 2.0 Spine 15L

£138 **2pure** www.2pure.co.uk

RIDING WITH AN incorporated back protector in your pack may not be for everyone but the POC's spine guard is about as light and malleable as they get. It's removable too, so you can choose when to use it. Away from the added protection, it's a comfortable pack to wear thanks to the neatly cut shoulder straps and padded rear. We like the Velcro strap tidies, but the lack of a clip on the shoulder strap for the hydration hose (or indeed a bladder) seem like strange omissions at this price. The waist straps are clever, made from heavy duty elastic with neat fasteners and slidable height adjustment, and there's a helmet pouch that fits a full-facer. With only one main pocket, you're forced to expose the rest of the payload to get at the tool stashes.

MBUK ★★½☆☆



Wingnut Hyper 2.5

£74.98 **Rough Ride Guide** www.roughrideguide.co.uk

RATHER THAN PLACING the weight of all your kit along your spine, Wingnut's Lowrider system puts it around the small of your back. It's an odd feeling for the first couple of rides, but it is comfortable. Despite its diminutive size, the Hyper 2.5 can swallow 10l of kit, and we particularly like the waterproof-zipped side pockets, which are easy to access even when riding. There are nice touches, such as the recycled inner tube strap tidies, but we'd like to see a separate phone/media pocket. Also, the bladder routing (no reservoir is supplied but most will fit) doesn't include a hook or clip for the mouthpiece, just a stretch loop. This means the drinking tube stays in place well but can make getting a drink without taking your eyes off the trail tricky.

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Leatt Cargo 3.0 GPX

£139.99 **Hotlines** www.hotlines-uk.com

THE NEW CARGO 3.0 is roomy for a harness-style pack – it has a 10l volume and, unlike most enduro packs, comes with a big 3l bladder. We aren't fans of the cap on the mouthpiece though – it makes drinking on the move needlessly tricky. The four-way straps are sturdy and help the pack stay in place well. It feels warm against your back, especially if you choose to use the thick foam spine protector. The Leatt pack offers a lot of storage, including a neat removable waterproof pocket for your smartphone, full-face helmet straps and webbed pockets for leg armour. It's compatible with Leatt neck braces too, making it a good option for downhillers. If you like the idea of a harness but crave more space, this could be the pack for you.

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Amplifi Stratos MK II

£150 (L/XL), £140 (S/M) **Paligap** www.paligap.cc

THE STRATOS IS notably heavier than any other pack here at just over 1.5kg but that's due largely to its motorbike-grade Armourgel back protector. Fat, cushy straps and a vented back panel add comfort, but with the spine guard in place and a bladder (not included) full of water it's a heavy beast, though it does stay in place well. It's a far comfier prospect without the back pad. Features include plenty of pockets (including easy-access hip ones), a heavy-duty rain cover, reflective light loop, helmet net, tool roll and compression straps to carry your pads. If you're the kind of rider who enjoys epic all-dayers yet heads off to the Alps for some gravity riding too, then this could be the pack for you. It comes in a range of colours, as well as black, and two sizes.

MBUK ★★★☆☆

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HOME ON THE RANGE

Discover the Norco Range, a modern aggressive enduro race rig that will leave you on the edge of your seat.

The bike is equipped with 160mm travel fork and optimized kinematics for Enduro racing making it a downhill-scorching weapon of choice, as selected by the Norco Enduro World team.

Available with carbon or alloy frame from £1,900, the bike also comes with the choice of SRAM X1, XX1, Shimano Deore and SLX componentry to suit all your needs.

Ride it as far and as fast as you dare.

NORCO BICYCLES

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EVANS CYCLES

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Photo: Matt Wragg

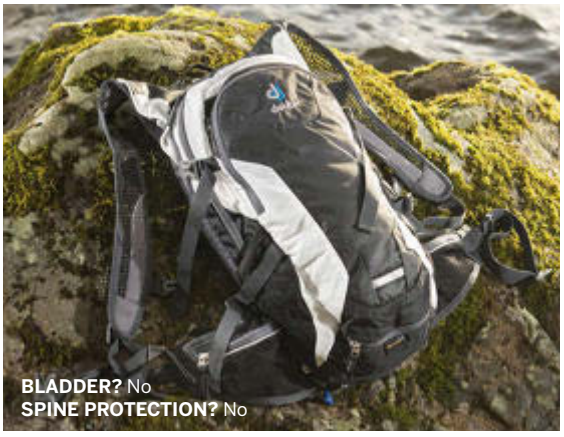


EVOC CC 3L

£59.95 **Silverfish UK** www.silverfish-uk.com

THIS IS THE smallest offering in the colourful EVOC range, which has long offered great build quality and fit. It's a good option if you don't want one of the new-generation 'harnesses' but still want a pack that's as small as possible. The included 2l bladder fits directly in the main compartment. There's only one other pocket – a zipped external number with a fleece lining that makes it ideal for phones. Once you get a tube, pump and tools in the pack, there's not a lot of space for much else, but you can stash a jacket under the removable bungee cord on the exterior. We like the way the drinking tube runs right to the bottom of the shoulder strap, keeping the mouthpiece out of the way, and there's a detachable hip belt for extra security. At £60 it's the cheapest pack here.

MBUK ★★★½☆



Deuter Compact EXP 12

£74.99 **i-ride** www.i-ride.co.uk

THE DEUTER IS one of those packs that feels like it has features crammed into every square centimetre. There's a large main space that can be expanded via a zip, a smaller yet still spacious pocket to the rear with tool stowage, a side-loading third pocket for a bladder (not included) and zipped pockets on the waist strap. There's also a roll-out helmet net and rain cover in fluoro yellow for on-road safety, plus compression straps to keep everything nice and tight. The webbing-style straps combined with the AirStripes back panel stop you getting too sweaty. Our only gripe is the lack of a lower loop for the drinking hose on the shoulder strap, which leaves the mouthpiece to either wang about or be tucked under the strap.

MBUK ★★★½☆



Vaude Tracer 15L

£80 **Vaude** www.vaude.com/en-GB

VAUDE'S GREATEST TRICK is making a large, spacious pack sit neatly in place without any drama, even when fully laden. That's mainly due to the (removable) solid backplate and the cavernous main pocket. Tools have their own easy-access pocket and there's plenty of support thanks to the chunky waist straps. The Tracer's load capacity, security and helmet storage make it ideal for travelling or multi-day rides, while the pull-out rain cover with reflective detailing makes it a great option if you're looking for a trail pack that'll happily take in the odd commute too. The well-padded shoulder straps keep things comfy, though the sheer size may deter those looking for a pack that's as at home on an enduro stage as it is on an XC spin.

MBUK ★★★½☆



Dakine Drafter 12L

£80 (£100 with 3l bladder) **Dakine Europe** eu.dakine.com

THE DRAFTER IS a pack designed for riders who prefer long days getting lost in the woods to race day palpitations. There's a fleeced outer phone pocket and one main hangar, which unzips fully to reveal pockets and pouches for tools and the like so you don't end up groping around blindly to find the kit you need. Twenty quid more gets you a 3l Hydrapak bladder. The rear panel has an Air Mesh system to raise the pack off your back slightly and allow air to circulate. This works well and doesn't result in any extra movement on the trails. There's also a permanent (and slightly meaty) helmet storage bay – great if you travel a lot with your bike, though some straps would do the job just as well (there are already some for carrying pads). It comes in some zany patterns too, if that's your bag.

MBUK ★★★½☆

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Funkier

HIGH PERFORMANCE CYCLING WEAR







BLOCKS 98% OF UV RAYS
UPF 50+
ULTRAVIOLET PROTECTION FACTOR

QUICK DRY

J-784-Women

Ladies PRO SS Jersey

- 100% polyester Quick Dry yarn arcs fabric, 95% polyester+ 5% spandex Quick Dry yarn Net panels.
- SG-6 gripper on hem.
- 2 back pockets + 1 water resistant pocket.
- Raglan short sleeve.
- Full plastic zipper.

J-774-Men

Gents Pro SS Jersey

- 100% polyester Quick Dry yarn bird eye mesh fabric 95% polyester+ 5% spandex Quick Dry yarn Net panels.
- Full plastic zipper.
- 3 back pockets + 1 water resistant pocket.
- Elastic binding on hem.
- Raglan short sleeve.

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Shimano Unzen 4L

£69.99 **Madison** www.madison.co.uk

THE UNZEN IS ideal for riders who like the idea of harness style minimalism but want a bit of added practicality. The lower straps feature Velcro adjustment, and a hook-and-loop system closes the pack in around you. That little alloy hook also makes it incredibly easy to get in and out of. There's a removable waist belt too, for added stability. A fleece-lined gadget pocket, separate netted bladder storage, rear bottle pocket for shorter rides, tool compartments and light loops (but no bladder) add up to a clever pack. It's even got goggle loops so you can keep your lens mist-free between enduro stages. A slight flaw is the side-only access to the main pocket, but the Unzen walks the tightrope between minimalism and practicality convincingly, and at a keen price too.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Mavic Crossmax 8.5

£95 **Mavic** www.mavic.co.uk

WHEN YOU'RE AS big a brand as Mavic, it would be all too easy to simply stamp your name on any old bag, but the French wheelsmiths have applied their typical attention to detail to this 8.5l enduro-style pack. Even with a full bladder (included) inserted there are still two cavernous full-length pockets, the outer of which is sectioned for tools. There's a helmet net tucked away, a loop for a rear light and a tidy exterior pocket ideal for instant-access items like goggles. The wide shoulder and waist straps make this one of the most comfy packs on test. We also like the pared-back looks and secure fit. While there's no plastic clip for the drinking hose, it's cleverly looped round so that you can slurp at shoulder height with ease.

MBUK ★★★★☆



USWE F3 Pro Enduro

£89.99 **Decade Europe** www.decade-europe.com

THIS IS THE dinkiest of the harness-style packs on test and it's been built with racing in mind. The main pocket is consumed by a 2l Hydrapak bladder, which, despite the snug surroundings, is easy to insert. You can just about squeeze some spare gloves or a windshell in there too. There's also a removable rear pocket big enough for a tube, pump, tools and your keys – just. The F3's best trick, though, is how it fits. There's one main buckle and each strap is individually Velcro adjustable to get the perfect fit (it can take a bit of experimenting) and keep it firmly in place on rough trails. As a result, it comes as close to that magical 'I'm not wearing a bag' feel as any pack here. Racing aside, it's fantastic for regular local rides if you can't be bothered with bottles.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Ergon BE1 Enduro

£129.99 **Extra UK** www.extrauk.co.uk

THE BE1 IS one of the most enduro-focused packs here but breaks from the harness trend. Its fit is among the best on test thanks to a choice of two sizes and an adjustable-length back section that changes the height of the shoulder straps. The boxy main pocket only offers one separated section so your phone, tools, tube and car keys will have to fight it out. The clever stuff happens in the lower pocket – the horizontal 1.5l bladder fits in there snugly, which shifts the majority of the weight to the small of your back so the pack remains anchored in place at all times. It's supposed to come with a flexible, slide-out spine protector but ours was missing, and has straps to carry a full-face helmet too. If going fast between the tapes is your goal, the BE1 has you covered.

MBUK ★★★★☆

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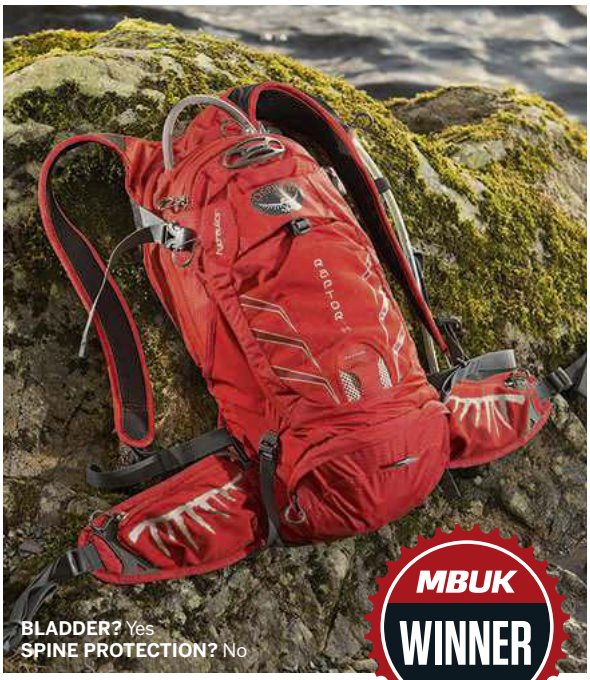
WRECKED & RATED Group Test

WINNERS

Tester says...



"What impressed me most during testing was the sheer attention to detail that brands are paying to just about every aspect of modern hydration packs. How these details come together is where the best examples excel though."



BLADDER? Yes
SPINE PROTECTION? No

Osprey Raptor 14

£90 **Osprey** www.ospreyeurope.com

THE OSPREY IS the only pack here that has its own sizing smartphone app, which sort of sets the tone. The 14l version is the biggest of three Raptors and boasts plenty of well thought out details. Our favourite is the roll-out ToolWrap pocket and work mat – an ingenious bit of space saving. When it's wet out, you can hang the Raptor from a tree, unfurl the tool roll from the base and avoid getting your pack soaked. The roll is also removable should you need to throw it at a mate. Osprey include their own 3l bespoke bladder, designed to keep a consistent shape, and the magnetised bite valve is a doddle to use. Even when caked with dirt, the mouthpiece snaps into place on the magnet on the chest strap, leaving you free to enjoy your ride.

Other pluses include the helmet-securing LidLock, handy zipped side pockets, internal key clip, internal organisation, sunglasses pocket, compression straps, vented back panel, light loop... the list goes on. The Osprey walks away victorious from this test because of the way that its numerous tidy details all meld together to create a pack that can take just about every type of riding in its stride. It's a great all-day pack for riders who like having a place for everything and everything being in its place. At the same time, if you want to give racing a go, the Raptor is light enough and more than tough enough to help you in the hunt for valuable seconds – it's a complete performer.

MBUK ★★★★½



BLADDER? Yes
SPINE PROTECTION? No

CamelBak Lobo

£79.99 **Zyro** www.zyro.co.uk

THE BUILD QUALITY of the revised Lobo is second to none. We love the CamelBak bladder system – the 3l reservoir is easy to fill, load and use, plus spares are available. The pack itself fits 6l of storage within its narrow form, which helps it sit comfortably on your back. We like the sensibly sized tool pockets and the neat helmet hooks. The straps are lightweight mesh and the belt is detachable. The two main pockets are large but it would be nice to see a separate waterproof pocket for mobile phones. The unusually large access hole for the drinking tube means you can hear liquid sloshing around in the bladder as you ride, which is a bit strange. These are minor niggles though and the Lobo is still up there with the very best lightweight day packs.

MBUK ★★★★☆



BLADDER? No
SPINE PROTECTION? No

Acre Hauser 10L

£165 (£185 with bladder) www.missionworkshop.com

THE ACRE PACK oozes style and will appeal if you look for a bit more craftsmanship in your riding gear. Handmade in the USA, it's fully waterproof and features an unusual roll-down top for the main compartment. The pack has three zipped exterior pockets, straps for pads, and we really like the tucked-away tool roll. The Aeroprene back panel covers a lot of your back but the perforations help manage your sweat. Because of the pack's malleable design, lumpy items can poke you in the back if you simply stuff them in. The handmade attention to detail and waterproofing make up for these niggles though, and the aesthetics make the Hauser just about as cool as hydration packs come. Right down to the stitching, this is a pack we don't think we'll ever get bored of.

MBUK ★★★★☆

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MBUK Manual

THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & PLACES TO GO FOR A BETTER RIDE



P155 HOW TO...

FIX YOUR RIDING FAULTS

Remedy the 10 most common riding faults



P176 WRECKING CREW

ROSTREVOR, NORTHERN IRELAND

We sail across the Irish Sea to check out the jewel in the crown of the province's new trail centres



P164 GRIMETIME

How to fit RockShox volume spacers to a Pike fork or Monarch shock



P166 ASK MBUK

Your questions, our answers, all of your mechanical problems solved



P168 THE BIG RIDE

Cadair Idris in Snowdonia qualifies as a proper epic ride: up and down a mountian

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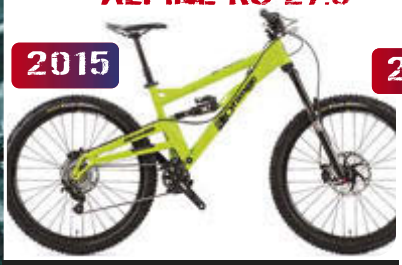
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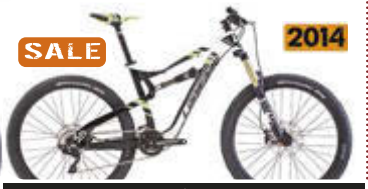


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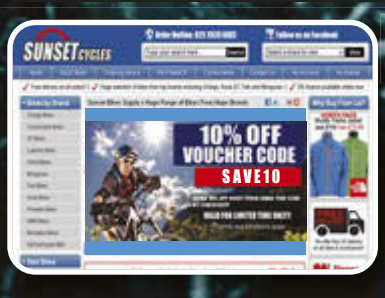
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FIX YOUR FAULTS

THE 10 MOST COMMON RIDING MISTAKES & HOW YOU CAN CURE THEM

Speed and changing terrain can make mountain biking a real technical challenge, so it's no wonder we sometimes make mistakes as we fly down the trails at full tilt. The key to improving is to avoid repeating the same mistakes, because they'll become bad habits. Some habits, like dragging the brakes, will slow you down and kill your flow, while others, like nosediving off jumps, are an accident waiting to happen. This feature is all about nipping those bad habits in the bud. We've chosen some of the most common mistakes made by mountain bikers and given a common fix for each to help you get the most out of your riding.



YOUR TUTORS

Pro Ride Guides are a team of elite mountain bike coaches who run skills training sessions in the UK. They're headed up by Joe Rafferty, who has 10 years' coaching experience, organises the 'Ard Rock Enduro and has finished ninth in the infamous Megavalanche. Highly experienced coaches and elite riders Ben Deakin and Joe Flanagan are also part of the team, as well as two of the UK's fastest enduro racers, Phil and Sam Shucksmith. **www.proridemtb.com**

THE PROBLEM

1# FINE WITH SMALL DROPS, STRUGGLE WITH BIGGER DROPS



✗The Fault

Pulling up. While pulling up on the handlebar can be effective on small drops, it can make it hard to progress because you're standing tall off the drop and making it even bigger than it already is – a recipe for disaster on bigger drops with steep landings.

✓The Fix Get lower and squash big drops by pushing the bike out in front of you and dropping your hips towards the rear tyre. Make sure your rear wheel is unweighted over the edge of the drop for a smooth flight.

THE PROBLEM

3# CAN'T GET ANY HEIGHT ON JUMPS



✗The Fault

No 'pop'. If you want to get some real air time and hit the downslopes of jumps, you need to develop your 'pop' rather than trying to hit everything flat out. Popping off the highest part of the lip will give you the extra height needed to clear the jump.

✓The Fix 'Pop' is very similar to bunnyhopping a high obstacle, so work on that first. Get low on approach, push into the transition with your legs, stand tall off the lip and hold the bar up so you can continue to apply pressure through the back wheel off the highest part of the jump.

THE PROBLEM

2# DRAGGING THE BRAKES THROUGH CORNERS



✗ The Fault

Not leaning enough. If your lean angle isn't enough for the speed you're travelling at and the radius of the corner, then the only thing you can do is drag the brakes to get round.

✓ The Fix The simple answer is to slow down, but no one wants to do that. Lean the bike more by twisting your hips towards the exit of the corner. Lower your chest in the corner to bend your arms so you have more range to lean the bike over, and always look towards the exit.

THE PROBLEM

4# ARM PUMP ON STEEP TRAILS



✗ The Fault

Body is out of balance. Leaning too far backwards or forwards when it gets steep and rough means you have to grip the bar tightly to support the weight of your upper body. This can fatigue the muscles in your hands and wrists prematurely.

✓ The Fix Let the bike move underneath you by relaxing your arms, dropping your heels and supporting your weight with your legs as much as possible, especially when braking hard.

THE PROBLEM

5# FRONT WHEEL WASHOUT IN CORNERS



✗The Fault **Defensive body position.** If you feel nervous in corners, you're probably leaning back and away from the ground you're worried about hitting. This makes you more likely to crash as it unweights the front wheel, causing it to lose grip.

✓The Fix Get some bend in your elbows by lowering your chest towards the bar, and ride a wide line. Doing this will keep your weight central and wheels tracking. Never enter a corner with straight arms, because you'll get dragged with the bike if the wheels do drift a little.

THE PROBLEM

6# STRUGGLE WITH STEEP MUD AND RUTS



✗The Fault **Braking hard and tensing up.** There's little grip in mud and ruts so you're going to have to let the bike slide if it wants to. Braking hard will make you stiffen up – not good for staying upright.

✓The Fix It's all about balance, so roll with it. Look over the muddy section or rut, commit to the exit, relax your upper body and stay off the brakes if it's safe to do so. Always brake progressively because jabbing will cause you to lose your grip and balance.

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THE PROBLEM

7# ALWAYS END UP ON THE WRONG LINE



✗ **The Fault** **Not focusing on your line**. It's only natural to fixate on the things you want to avoid, but it doesn't help your line choice because you'll miss early entry points to good lines and be sucked towards tight inside lines on corners.

The Fix Get your chin up and focus on looking ahead. A good 'drill' is to look ahead so you can't see your front tyre in your field of vision. Doing this will help you spot lines earlier and give you more time to prepare and read the trail.

THE PROBLEM

8# SLIDE OUT ON ROOTS



✗ **The Fault** **Not unweighting your wheels**. You should always aim to avoid diagonal roots, but if this isn't possible, try to make your wheels light over them and dial in your timing so you can react quickly if the bike slips.

✓ **The Fix** Place a stick on the ground and ride at it. Use a manual and rear wheel lift to avoid contacting it with your tyres. Practise this at different speeds and with a couple of sticks to improve your timing and coordination.

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THE PROBLEM

9# NOSEDIVING OFF JUMPS



✗The Fault

Leaning back just before the lip. If you think you're going to nosedive then it's intuitive to ride defensively and lean back, but this will mean your rear tyre hooks up on the top of the jump and sends your front end down.

✓The Fix Focus on maintaining a neutral body position during the run-up, then push against the transition with your legs. If you're still nosediving, slow the rebound on your rear shock down a touch too.

THE PROBLEM

10# LOSE GRIP ON CLIMBS



✗The Fault

Stamping on the pedals in a low gear. If you're in the wrong gear or you're stamping hard on the pedals you'll lose rear tyre traction and speed, which will cause you to spin out and stop.

✓The Fix Choose a slightly higher gear when you're struggling for traction and aim to pedal smoothly. If you lose grip in a higher gear you'll have a better chance of keeping your momentum.


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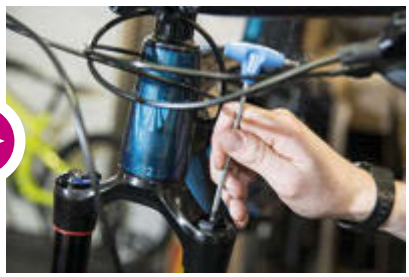
HOW TO FIT ROCKSHOX VOLUME SPACERS

TIME 30 mins **COST** £12.99 for Bottomless Tokens (fork), £13.99 for Bottomless Rings (shock)

Want to adjust the spring curve of your Pike fork or Monarch DebonAir or High Volume shock? Here's how...

RockShox Pike fork





01 Ensure the bike is clean, so no dirt can fall into the fork. It's also best to have the bike in a workstand. Remove the air valve dust cap from the top of the non-driveside fork leg, turning it anticlockwise with your fingers, and put it somewhere safe. Attach a shock pump to the Schrader valve and take a note of the air pressure.

02 Release all the air from the spring using the bleed button on the shock pump. Remove the pump and press a ball-ended Allen key – or similar narrow object – into the valve to release any air that may remain.







03 Now you'll need to use a 24mm socket and wrench to unscrew the air cap on the top of the non-driveside fork leg. Ensure the socket is engaged securely with the flats on the air cap, then turn the wrench anticlockwise, holding the fork with your other hand to keep it steady. Remove the air cap from the fork. If there are any red Bottomless Tokens already fitted, they'll be screwed into this.

04a For a more progressive spring rate, add one or more tokens by screwing them clockwise into the air cap. Use an 8mm Allen key and 24mm socket to tighten them until gently snug (1.1-2.3Nm). Don't exceed the maximum number of tokens recommended for your fork (you can check this at **www.sram.com/service**). The 140-160mm travel Pike in 26in, 650b and 29in sizes takes a maximum of four Bottomless Tokens, for example.

04b For a more linear feel, use an 8mm Allen key and 24mm socket to unscrew (anticlockwise) one or more Bottomless Tokens from the base of the air cap. Set them aside and ensure that any remaining tokens are tightened to 1.1-2.3Nm with the 8mm Allen key and 24mm socket.

WORKSHOP WISDOM

Removing the air cap from the top of a fork can be a tense procedure. Most sockets are internally chamfered and that can make it difficult to get a good purchase on the shallow, alloy nut on the air cap. If you're not careful it's easy to round it off, making it very difficult to remove. To prevent this, it's worth trying to get hold of a ground-flat socket from a bike shop or hardware store. These aren't internally chamfered so they get a better purchase on the nut and are much less likely to damage it. They're as rare as hen's teeth though!





05 Apply suspension grease to the air cap O-ring and reinstall the air cap in the fork. Using the 24mm socket, turn the air cap clockwise by hand as far as you can, taking care not to cross-thread it. Then attach a socket wrench and tighten the air cap to 28Nm while applying downward pressure on to the socket to avoid rounding the nut.

06 Attach the shock pump to the valve and reinflate the air spring to your desired pressure. Remove the pump, release the bike from the workstand and check the fork's sag. Adding or removing Bottomless Tokens will change the sag slightly for a given pressure so you may need to add or remove pressure to achieve the same sag as before. Reinstall the air valve cap.



Tools for the job Essential kit

1 Shock pump
2 Suspension grease
3 Rags or cloth
4 Torque wrench
5 Allen key set
6 Socket wrench
7 24mm socket
8 Bottomless Tokens
9 Bottomless Rings

Not pictured
Soft-jawed vice

RockShox Monarch DebonAir or HV shock



01 Clean the bike and, if possible, clamp it in a workstand. Remove the air valve dust cap from the shock. Attach a shock pump to the Schrader valve and take a note of the air pressure. Release all the air from the spring using the bleed button on the shock pump. Remove the pump and press a ball-ended Allen key – or similar narrow object – into the valve to release any air that may remain.



02 Now to remove the shock from the bike. Take up the weight of the rear wheel with one hand while using the required Allen key(s) for your frame to turn the shock mounting bolts anticlockwise with the other. Remove the bolts and set them aside somewhere safe. Clean the shock, to prevent damage or contamination during disassembly.



03 If the mounting hardware on the shaft eyelet is wider than the damper shaft itself, it must be removed. First remove the spacers from the ends of the bushing pin by hand. To remove the bushing pin from the eyelet, first try to push it out with your thumb. If it's reluctant to move by hand, check the SRAM website (**www.sram.com/service**) for a detailed guide on how to remove it, or take the shock to your local bike shop.



04 Now to remove the retaining O-ring from the DebonAir/High Volume sleeve. Pinch the O-ring with your index finger and thumb to create a loose/baggy area, then with your other hand carefully grasp the exposed portion of O-ring and slide it down and off of the air sleeve. Put it somewhere clean and safe.



05 Clamp the shock eyelet hardware at the air can end of the shock in a soft-jawed vice. Grip the DebonAir/High Volume sleeve with your hands and pull firmly down over the shock shaft to remove it. Put the sleeve somewhere clean and safe.



06 Slide the required number of Bottomless Rings on to the air can so they're lined up above the rib in the middle of the can. Check the SRAM website to find out the maximum number that can be fitted to your shock, and make sure not to exceed this.



07 Now to reinstall the DebonAir/High Volume sleeve. With the shock clamped in the vice, slide the sleeve over the air can and Bottomless Rings, and push it firmly into place. Lightly grease the retention O-ring, then slide it over the shock shaft and roll it into the groove with your fingers. If the groove isn't wide enough, the sleeve isn't fully installed, so retry this step.



08 Refit the mounting hardware (if removed). Now to reinstall the shock in the frame. While taking up the weight of the rear wheel with one hand, thread the shock bolts through the frame and shock eyelets and tighten them (clockwise) to the frame manufacturer's torque specifications, using the correct Allen key(s).



09 Attach a shock pump and reinflate the shock until the desired sag is achieved – you may need to reduce/increase the pressure relative to the previous values to get the correct amount of sag. Remove the pump and reinstall the air valve dust cap. Go for a ride and use the sag indicator ring on the shock shaft to determine whether or not you've used full travel.

NEXT MONTH **Replace your frame pivot bearings**
How to fix play and creaks in your bike's rear end **ON SALE 1 MAY**

ASK MBUK

YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED BY OUR EXPERTS

Q **I'm about to purchase a 2015 Orange Alpine 160 AM but I'm unsure what fork to get. I'v always used Fox forks and the bike comes with a 34 Float CTD Evo. My question is, is it worth upgrading to a RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air for £150 more? I ride a mix of cross-country and moderate downhill.**
Andy O'Dowda, via email


RockShox's Pike is a stiffer, lighter and better damped fork than Fox's 34 Float

A Although the Evolution series Fox 34 has been greatly improved over the past year or so, the Pike still trumps it in terms of damping performance. The RockShox fork also has a stiffer chassis, making for more accurate and precise steering. It'll feel more solid on the heavier hits you're likely to encounter when you're tackling technical downhill trails too. You might expect the stiffer, burlier Pike to be heavier than the 34 but you'd be wrong. RockShox have managed to keep it relatively light – even in its longest 160mm (6.3in) travel guise – so there'll be less weight to drag back up the hills too. Set-up of the Pike is just as easy as the 34, and it's easy to tune the feel of the suspension stroke by using RockShox's 'Bottomless Tokens' to adjust the air spring volume.


When it comes to grip on flat pedals, you can't beat Five Ten's Stealth rubber

Q **I need some new flat pedal shoes. My Five Tens are six years old and pretty much dead. I'm not bothered about price, I just want the grippiest ones.**
Jamie Lenzo, Stoke-on-Trent

A We'd stick with Five Tens – they just can't be beaten when it comes to grip. The latest Impact VXis do retain a bit of water on really wet days but the grip is phenomenal. At £115 they're not cheap though. We're also fans of the Giro Jackets, which are £15 cheaper but not quite as grippy.

Q **I'm approaching my 30th birthday and with two years of great riding and a lot of learning under my belt, I'm going to treat myself to a new bike. I've been riding and loving my Trek 29er for two years but I've been aching for full suspension and more travel. I had my heart set on an On-One Codeine 29er but after reading reviews of the 650b Bird Aeris I'm not so sure.**
Craig Scullion, Bradford

A This is a tricky one for us to help you with, unfortunately. While the Bird Aeris did fantastically well in our First Ride in issue 311, the On-One Codeine is a bit of an unknown quantity because we haven't been able to get hold of one. Both bikes come with great specs but will no doubt ride very differently. With the pricing and specs being so similar, we'd highly recommend trying to arrange demo rides so that you can experience them both for yourself before you decide.

QUICK FIX MOUNTAIN BIKE TIPS

How to fit a cassette



01 After removing the old cassette (see our walkthrough in issue 314), inspect the freehub body for signs of damage. If there's excessive bearing wear or heavy notching on the body itself it may require a full service by a professional.



02 Get the new cassette lined up with the freehub body, making sure to match the slot spacing on the inside of the cassette sprockets with the slot spacing on the freehub body. Slide the sprockets on to the freehub body until they can't go any further.



03 Screw the cassette lockring into the freehub body with your hand, turning it clockwise. Once it's finger tight, use a cassette lockring tool to tighten it to the cassette manufacturer's recommended torque setting.

CONTACT US: **Write to:** Ask *MBUK*, 9th Floor, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol **Email:** askmbuk@bikeradar.com **Visit:** www.mbuk.com

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MBUK BIG RIDE

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CADAIR IDRIS, SNOWDONIA

WANT TO RIDE A REAL MOUNTAIN? ONE OF WALES'S FINEST LIES JUST DOWN THE ROAD FROM COED-Y-BRENIN

Words Max Darkins **Pics** Andy Lloyd

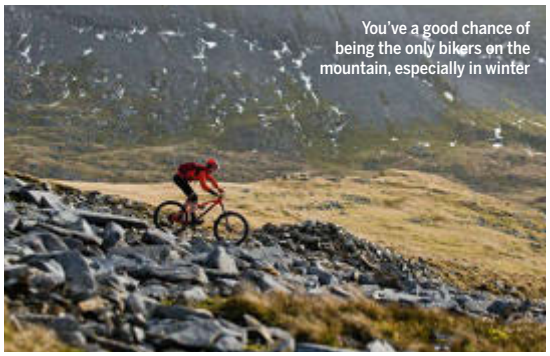


MBUK BIG RIDE

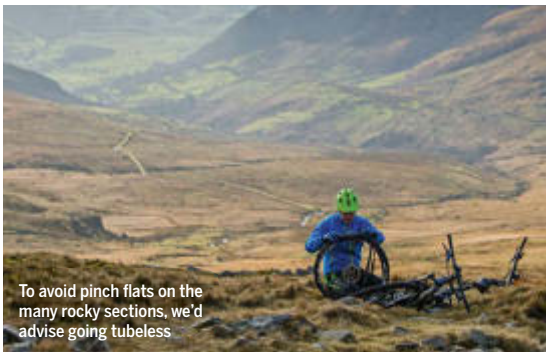
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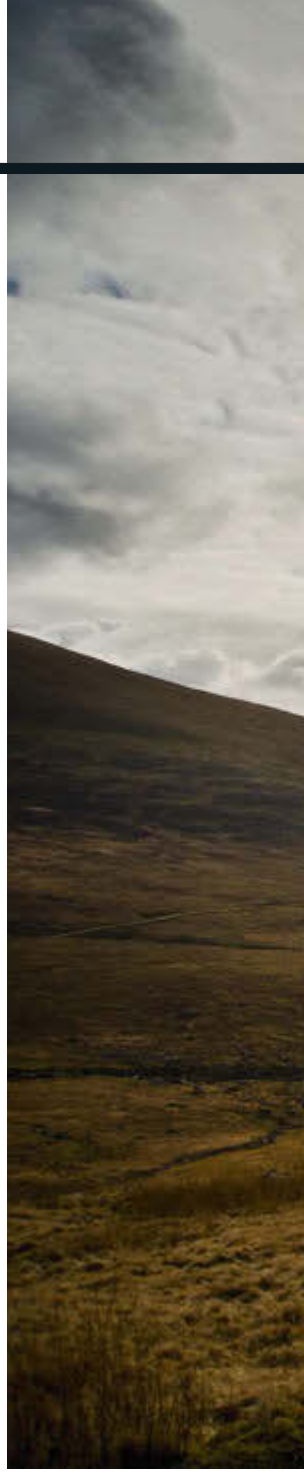
With rock gardens like this you're best off bringing a more burly bike



You've a good chance of being the only bikers on the mountain, especially in winter



To avoid pinch flats on the many rocky sections, we'd advise going tubeless





Cadair Idris is the second most popular peak in Wales after Snowdon, and unlike that tourist hotspot you can ride it any time you like. Located between Dolgellau and Machynlleth, it's not far from some very good manmade trails, and Snowdon itself. So why would you come here? Well, that's half the answer – because lots of people don't. It's a fairly popular walk but bikers seem to get distracted by other destinations en route.

Today we've been rewarded with a beautifully clear, albeit very cold, morning. As Andy and I pull up at the foot of the mountain we're met by Neil Delafield, who runs the Red Kite events and Mondraker Enduro Series in mid Wales, and Peter Lloyd, an uber-keen young rider sponsored by Whyte Bikes. Pete is raring to go, and I'm hoping some of his energy is going to rub off on the rest of us as we stand shivering in the car park, looking up at the snow-capped peaks.

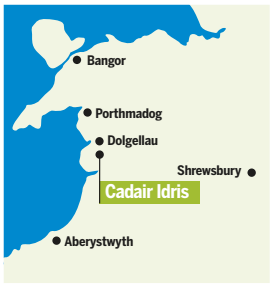
Dig deep

We set off, straight into the climb and are soon in the sun so we quickly warm up – we're shedding layers before we even reach the second gate. We follow the main track up, past sheep pens, which enables us to gain a good amount of height pretty painlessly. Then we bear to the right, where the trail kicks up properly. Although it's grassy there's a good stony surface underneath that offers plenty of grip, so there's nothing for it but to dig deep and grind up this short, sharp climb, especially as a friendly walker is urging us on.

The gradient soon eases off as the surroundings »

THE LOWDOWN

CADAIR IDRIS



Cadair Idris tops out at 892m (2,927ft), and while it's only the 19th highest mountain in Wales, it's a good one, and one you can ride up and down whenever you want. **www.visitsnowdonia.info**

THE GRADIENT SOON EASES OFF AS THE SURROUNDINGS SUDDENLY CHANGE TO OPEN, GRASSY MOORLAND



Young Pete is the master of the power slide on the greasy grass

Community Route

Each month a member of the ViewRanger community shares their bonus route with you



Name: Eifion Jones **From:** Tal-y-bont, Aberystwyth **Route:** The Dragon's Back

The Dragon's Back is a classic cross country route with lots of ups and downs. A real flavour of what the Cambrian Mountains has to offer without once going near man made single-track. The old school riding finishes in a choice of traditional Welsh pubs serving good food and quality local ales.



To get this great ride, just scan the QR code with your mobile device



WE START THE DESCENT BY CRASHING OVER BOULDERS BEFORE SKITTERING OVER LOOSE ROCKS

suddenly change to open, grassy moorland. It feels remote, with the ribbon of singletrack meandering far into the distance. The trail is slightly damp and cut up, but it's all ridable and the challenge is a welcome distraction from the climbing still left to do. As we approach the steep northern face the trail bears to the right, running up and along the ridge, where it becomes a bit too challenging to ride in a few places, so we join the walkers who are now starting to appear.

The footpaths to the north are busier than the bridleway we've come along, but we're made to feel more than welcome by every single person who passes us as they offer words of encouragement, hold gates open and occasionally politely question our sanity. There's still a bit of snow around and a strong icy cold wind, but isn't this what mountain biking is all about?

As we pull, push and carry our bikes towards the summit we can appreciate the stunning scenery on this crisp and sunny day. Oh man, this is going to be fun to come back down! Well, more so for the others who've brought long-travel bikes rather than a stand-in XC bike... I also wish I'd set my bike up tubeless. I puncture on a rocky section and my tyre and rim take such a battering that the new tube soon explodes too.

Faffing and freezing

After squeezing about 1,000psi into my second (and last) spare tube, I'm anxious that the ride back down will become a walk. Due to all the faffing we've got quite cold. There's frost on the tufts of grass where they've caught the moisture in the wind, and deep pockets of snow that have refused to melt. Neil finds refuge in a crumbling hut that's mostly filled with snow but has enough room to hide from the bitter wind, but the rest of us stubbornly push on.

The very last section is a hike-a-bike up and the »

WHAT IS VIEWRANGER?



ViewRanger is an app that lets outdoor enthusiasts discover, plan, navigate and share their adventures on smartphones, on tablets and online. With offline mapping (including Ordnance Survey maps), turn-by-turn navigation and bike computer functions like ride time, ride distance and current, average and maximum speed, it'll turn your phone into a fully fledged GPS unit.

You can also use it to plan or download routes, access guidebook-style information, broadcast your location and track your friends. It has a social platform too, where you can store and share their adventures.

ViewRanger is used by more than 400 official bodies, including search-and-rescue teams in the UK and overseas.



The ViewRanger app is available to download for Apple, Android, Blackberry 10, Kindle Fire and Symbian devices.

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ROCK HOPPERS
Sometimes you can pick a line, other times your best bet is just point and shoot

same back down. Because the wind is blowing hard we decide to stop here instead of carrying on to the summit, and mess around on some interesting runs. We make ourselves even colder though, so I whip out my emergency shelter and survival jelly babies. Peter announces he knows another way to warm our hands and presents us with some rubber gloves, which gets Andy slightly concerned, but I assure him rubber gloves under cycling gloves work a treat. At least, that's what I hope Peter is suggesting.

Gimme shelter

After a few minutes inside our fabric bubble, making sounds of both pleasure and pain, we emerge happy and donning rubber gloves, much to the bemusement of some passing walkers. We're now nicely warmed up, sugared up and buoyed up, ready to rip back down the mountain.

The descent is well worth all the climbing, and the cold, with the varying terrain keeping it exciting all the way back down because you have to pay attention to the very different surfaces. With the setting sun shining in our eyes, we start off by crashing over boulders before skittering over loose rocks and then blasting back along the moorland singletrack. Next it's onto the slithery off-camber slopes before power sliding around greasy grassy corners and onto the farm track once again.

In all the excitement of racing one another we miss the bridleway turning and, with tired legs and gravity on its side, the farm track wins by default so we continue on it at breakneck speed, drifting around the loose corners and almost coming a cropper a few times at closed gates.

Eventually the gradient eases and the rush of wind past our ears fades as we cruise sedately back along the lane to our vans, knees up around out chins as dropper posts refuse to behave. Back at the van we're all still buzzing from our adventure and agree that this is what real mountain biking is all about.

BEST EATING



The Railway Inn in Abergynolwyn (01654 782279), just back on the main road that runs along the valley (the B4405), is a nice pub, serving real ales and good food. The portions are generous, it's really good value and the staff are friendly too. There's a nice cafe just across the road from the pub as well, the Caffi'r Ceunant (01654 782372), which also serves up some good grub.

Bike BIZ TOP 20 IBD

Bike Scene

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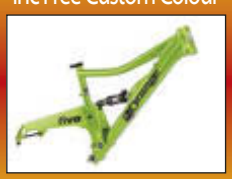
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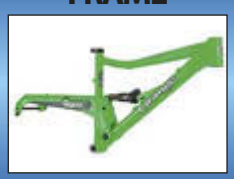
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WRECKING CREW

Mountain Biking UK

Rostrevor, County Down

Northern Ireland's jewel in the trail centre crown, almost equidistant between Belfast and Dublin, boasts an incredible network of trails. We went to see what all the fuss is about

Words Ric McLaughlin **Pics** Simon Nieborak



THE LOWDOWN

ROSTREVOR, CO DOWN, NI

DISTANCE: 27KM RED/19KM BLACK (PLUS DH RUNS)

CLIMBING: LONG INITIAL CLIMB BUT WELL WORTH IT

TIME: 3HRS RED/2HRS BLACK

GRADING: RED

WHY RIDE HERE?

The views and long descents are both superb but, more than that, Rostrevor boasts some fantastic technical challenges

RAD...

- Scenery – check out the Vitus Bikes 2015 launch video if you don't believe us!
- Rocks – lots of them to bang/clatter/skip/smash through
- Flow – the Dafydd Davies trademark of wandering flow is here in abundance

BAD...

- The jumps of Mega Mission require caution
- Punctures likely

Before you start checking out the lengthy trail map, or even turn a pedal in the car park of the Kilbroney Forest Park, it's important to look at the Rostrevor trails in a grander context. Opened in 2013, this centre on the scenic banks of Carlingford Loch, along with its four sibling trail centres, marks the real arrival of mountain biking in Northern Ireland.

Yes, the country has some pedigree of course, but the Mountain Bike NI sites represent the kind of manmade trail riding that the province previously lacked. In a country besieged by red tape concerning land access, finally there are places to ride and race.

We've no time to reflect on the importance of Rostrevor though, because we're running late. The sandwich on my lap is spilling its contents as I battle to keep up with downhill legend Glyn O'Brien's van, while snapper Simon is busy hanging out of the window trying to photograph the stunning landscape.

Push on

We arrive at Kilbroney painfully behind schedule and quickly load the bikes, kit and national champ Colin Ross into »

THIS IS DEFINITELY MORE 'BLACK' COUNTRY – EDGES CREEP OUT OF NOWHERE IN THE DARK WOODS

The Wrecking Crew

Who are we?



GLYN O'BRIEN

A Northern Irish icon, Glyn has World Cup top 10 finishes under his belt as well as placing third at Red Bull Rampage.



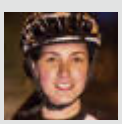
COLIN ROSS

Former World Cup racer and reigning Irish national DH champ, Rosco runs his own skills coaching business.



RIC MCLAUGHLIN

Former *MBUK* staffer Ric enjoys poking around Scottish woodland in search of hidden trails and unfinished pack lunches.



SACHA BICKERSTAFF

Local girl Sacha had a stellar 2014 racing season and may just be ready to set the Junior Women's World Cup ranks on fire too.



The long climb at the start of the XC trail is worth it for the view



TRAIL VID

Watch Glyn O'Brien blasting down Mega Mission at Rostrevor trails on our *MBUK* blog **http://bit.ly/167nJWe**

MBUK.com



There are some cracking singletrack descents...



... and some much gnarlier stuff on the two DH tracks

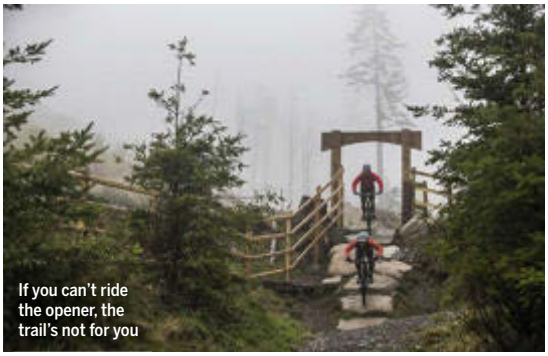
the back of our pick-up and take the cheater's option by driving up to the top car park. We're also joined by Colin's latest protegé and Vitus Bikes gravity team member, 15-year-old Sacha Bickerstaff. The spin to the top is usually a relaxed saunter up as opposed to anything too aggressive, but our would-be shortcut forces us into a more direct route that prompts an unspoken game of 'first one to push loses'.

The view from the top of the trail is up there with the best in the UK. Carlingford Loch is as still as a millpond and the sunlight dapples through the low hanging cloud. We're losing the light though, so press on. The opening stretch is fast and smooth. I raced these trails when they first opened and a year of pretty heavy traffic has really helped them settle and dig in. The surface is littered with larger slabs and ledges to keep you focused in between corners and narrow bridges.

Red is for rip it

A feature of the Northern Irish centres we've ridden previously is that the trails are graded in the context of the individual venue rather than based on one all-encompassing guide, and it's the same here. The longer red route incorporates all but 2-3km of the black trail. We duck back on ourselves on to the black graded section and the rock formations increase in ferocity and angles. It's not perhaps black in the way mainland UK trail centres would grade it, but it's serious/fun enough to warrant a degree of caution/abandon.

Sacha has just finished her first season of racing and is »



If you can't ride the opener, the trail's not for you





THE JAGGED ROCK EDGES FROM EARLIER ARE BACK IN GREATER NUMBERS WITH FIERCER ANGLES

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

LOCALS DO...

- Book the uplift well in advance
- Pack a camera – you'll regret it if you don't
- Have a Pooh Bear latte after riding. They'll laugh at you – until it turns up

LOCALS DON'T

- Roll into anything they're unsure of. The openings of the more technical trails are deliberately harsh – don't hope it'll get any easier, 'cos it won't

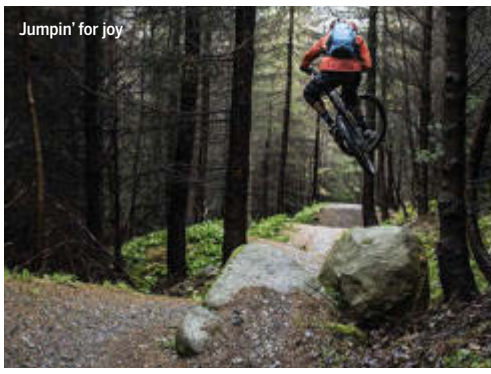
considering making an assault on the UCI World Cup stage in 2015. "Having the trails here is great," the Co Down girl smiles. "It's fantastic for training and so handy just to get riding time in." We finish on a more DH focused section called Home Run that's clad with large slabs of angry rock. This is definitely more 'black' country – edges creep out of nowhere in the dark woods and the front and rear take it in turns to briefly let go and slide along them. Again, the descent is long and physical and a lot of fun. We finish up with a death grip, aero tuck run down the fireroad back to the car park before heading back up to our truck.

Next morning, the rain beats against the windows of the Whistledown Hotel in nearby Warrenpoint as Simon and I munch toast and sip coffee. It looks bleak. Thankfully, a quick visit to East Coast Adventure across the road has us an uplift sorted – game on! When it's wet and miserable, you really do want to be around Glyn O'Brien. His incredible energy sees us strap the bikes on to the rather flash BMW X5-drawn uplift trailer and head to the top of the two most talked about DH tracks in Ireland.

DH danger

Mega Mission is the first on the menu, and I have history with it – at an enduro here last year I managed to come off, split my helmet open and concuss myself. It's also broken more than a few collarbones... Glyn disappears within the first few turns and I hear him jabbering away into the GoPro I've just strapped on to him.

The 1.8km track consists mainly of steeply-faced tabletops with blind backsides, which makes things tricky because it's virtually impossible to spot your landings. It's fast too, which keeps the smile firmly fixed on your face. Although a touch »



Jumpin' for joy



WRECKING CREW WISDOM

"Rostrevor is situated right between Dublin and Belfast and is the longest and most technically challenging set of legal trails on the island of Ireland. It's a more than decent sized loop but the weather can change quickly in the hills so pack layers."

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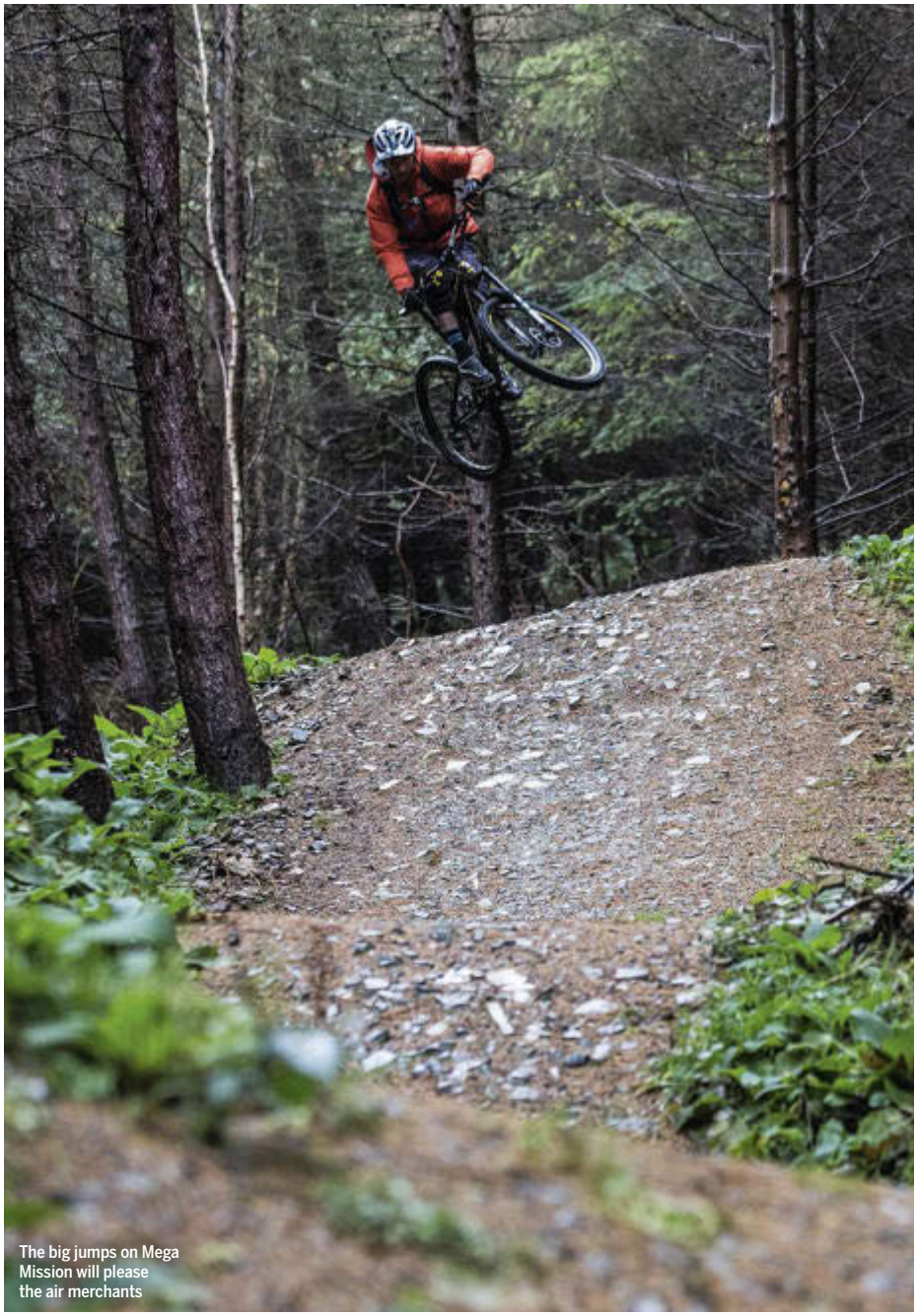
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The big jumps on Mega Mission will please the air merchants

nervous at the upper speed limits, my 150mm travel Scott feels about right in terms of machinery and I can definitely see the appeal in multiple runs.

Rocky horror

On The Pulse is an altogether different beast. Although slightly shorter, the jagged rock edges from earlier are back in greater numbers with fiercer angles and have me hankering for the surefootedness of a DH bike. The rock severely hampers speed, and finding any kind of flow through the dark chute is tricky. Getting on to the wider, faster lines is trickier still but fun for the same reason. Then the inevitable happens. After hearing a fair few rim/rock interfaces, there's finally the pop and pathetic 'pfffffft' of a puncture. It's my own fault for trying to clear a gap between two cleaver-like edges.

We get changed and dried before ordering a round of chicken wraps and large coffees in the warm confines of the cafe. Even five years ago, the idea of indulging in an amazing trail ride and half day's downhilling on legal, manmade trails in Northern Ireland was a pipe dream. Now mountain biking has truly arrived, and Rostrevor offers a tantalising glimpse of its potential.

THE DIRECTORY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT **ROSTREVOR**

GET THERE

From Belfast drive south towards Dublin on the M1. Come off at the Lisburn junction and on to Newry on the A1. The A2 will take you through Warrenpoint. Follow the Shore Road before looking for the 'Rostrevor Park/ Kilbroney Trails' signpost.

CONTACT

Mountain Bike NI
www.mountainbikeni.com

FACILITIES

Parking, bike wash, bike hire, cafe, toilets, showers, camping

BIKE SHOPS

Ross Cycles, Castlewellan, 028 437 78029
Mourne Cycles, Newcastle, 028 4372 7272

WHAT ELSE IS NEARBY?

Castlewellan (XC)
Northern Ireland's most popular trail centre offers an awesome pump track and plenty of flow and speed on the trails.

Barnett Demesne (XC)
Stiff and tired after the ferry? The micro trail network of Barnett Demesne is a mere 10 minutes from the boat and offers trail riding right in the heart of Belfast.

Davagh Forest (XC)
Head to the middle of nowhere then turn right. Davagh is a bit of a drive but is an excellent counterpoint to Castlewellan with its more technical, natural – and emptier – trails.

VERDICT

Mixing speed, distance and technical challenges through a range of incredible scenery, Rostrevor felt every bit as spectacular as we'd hoped. A fantastic focal point for any riding trip in Northern Ireland

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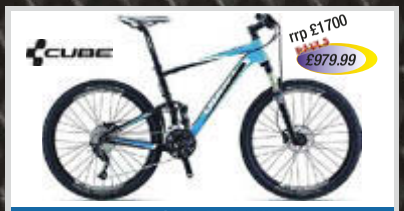
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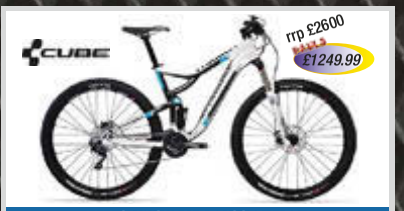
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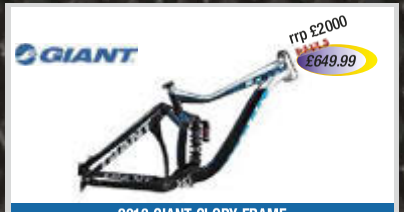
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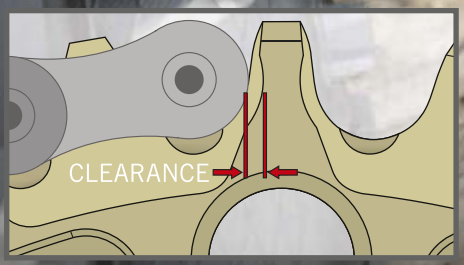
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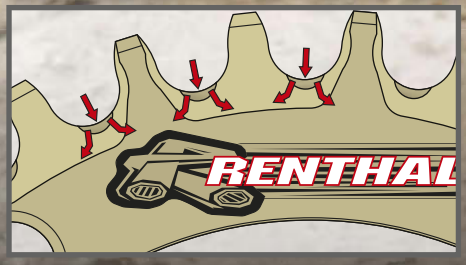


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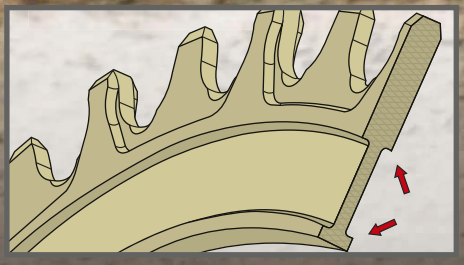
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